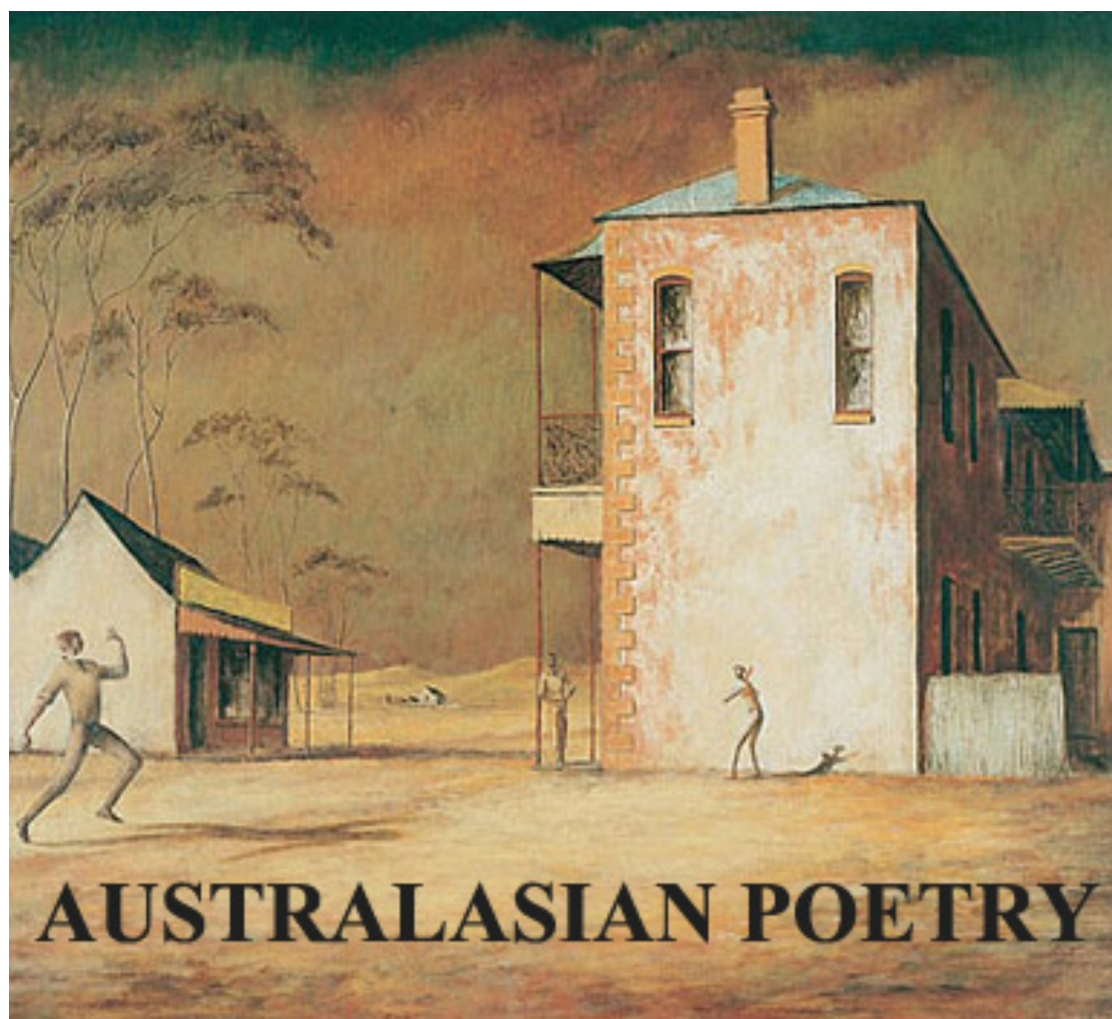




AUSTRALASIAN POETRY

INTRODUCTION

Front cover painting: *The Cricketers*, by Russell Drysdale



Kelly and Riverbend (1964), Sidney Nolan

AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE, LETTERS AND LITERATURE

Australian language, letters and literature in Australia has been influenced by Aboriginal storytelling, convict tales and the desire by colonists to relate their experiences in a new country.

Some of those early works have remained part of the Australian ethos. Marcus Clarke's *For the term of his natural life*, for example, is still being published today, more than 100 years after it was written.

Similarly, the bush ballads of Henry Lawson and Andrew 'Banjo' Paterson have become so ingrained in Australian history, that most Australians are word-perfect when singing *Waltzing Matilda*. C J Dennis's *The Sentimental Bloke* remains another favourite with its use of slang language.

Letters

Some famous writings include the *Jerilderie Letter*, which was dictated by Ned Kelly to Joe Byrne in February 1879. It is the only document providing a direct link to the Kelly Gang and the events with which they were associated. The letter articulates Kelly's pleas of innocence and desire for justice for both his family and the poor Irish selectors of Victoria's north-east.

The *Coranderrk Letter* was written in 1882 by William Barak, an Aborigine living on Coranderrk Station. Barak wrote the letter protesting about the management and treatment of Aborigines. He and other Aboriginal Elders continued to petition, including a letter to Queen Victoria.

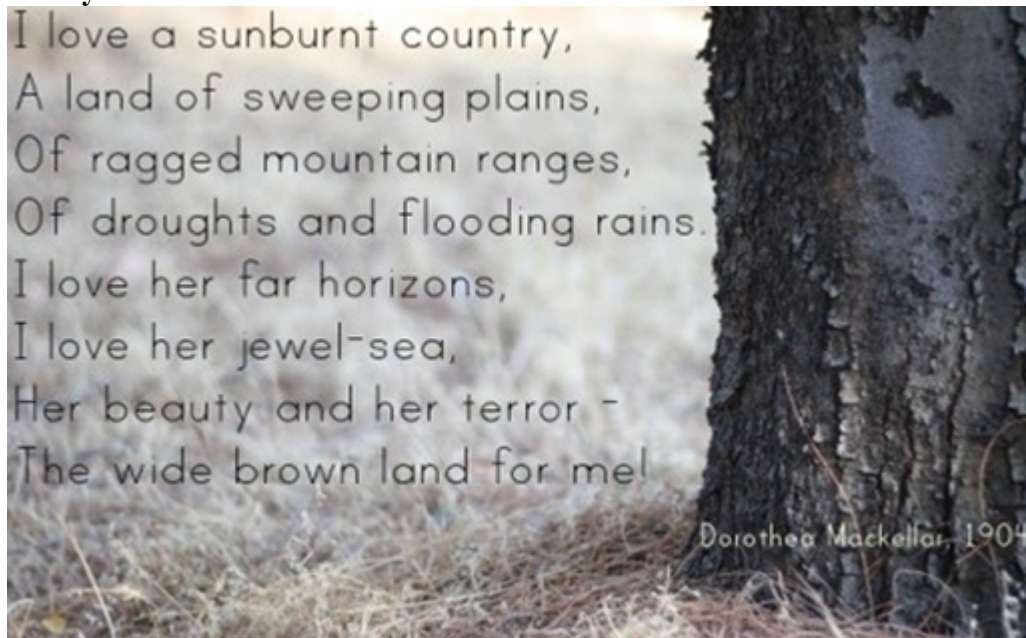
Another famous petition was by the Yolngu people. In 1963, the Yolngu sent the Yirrkala Bark Petitions to the House of Representatives in protest against the Commonwealth's granting of mining rights to Nabalco over land excised from Arnhem Land reserve. The result was a parliamentary inquiry which recommended that compensation was owed to the Yolngu.

In another vein, the letters of Judith Wright, published as *With Love and Fury* (2006) explore the complex relationships that fed the poet's creative life. The correspondence with Jack McKinney (later her husband) between 1945-46, coincides with the most fertile periods of her poetic career. Judith's correspondence with Queensland poet, Jack Blight 'constitute a running commentary on the Australian literary scene as well as what she was reading and thinking about poetry and writing in general' (Meredith McKinney, 2007).

Gwen Harwood's letters published as *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995* (2001) are described as:

Spirited and witty, warm, reflective, at times enraged, often overcome by laughter; the letters are so varied that this large volume can be read as one might read a novel or an autobiography. It would be a pity just to dip in at random: this is the story of the making of a poet.

Poetry



From the 1830s, distinctive early Australian poetic voices began to emerge. Charles Harpur was regarded as the country's leading poet. Harpur wrote of the solitude and grandeur of a landscape that dwarfs its people. Henry Kendall, encouraged by Harpur, was the first Australian poet to draw his inspiration from the

life, landscape and traditions of Australian, and its influence on human beings. George Gordon McCrae incorporated Aboriginal themes into his poetry. The English-born Adam Lindsay Gordon, with his *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870), 'revitalised the traditional ballad form by infusing it with bush themes'.

The names of early Australian poets and authors are well known today. Indeed they conjure images of a time of exploration, adventure and excitement, as well as a poignant reminder of the hardships of living in the newly formed colonies. Adam Lindsay Gordon, Dorothea MacKellar, Harry 'Breaker' Morant, Barcroft Boake, Henry Kendall and Henry Handel Richardson, chronicled the early settlement days in poetry and prose.

Modern poets

Modern Australian poets were influenced both by the 'literary nationalism' of the late 1890s which espoused Australian values as well as the contemporary modernist writings which challenged writers to use their imagination and be innovative in describing what was 'real'. AD Hope and Judith Wright were seen as the giants of post war poetry circles in Australia. Hope wrote about love, faith and spirituality. Wright was regarded as 'marvelously lucid ... rich and clear' as well as being the first white Australian poet to publicly name and explore the experiences of its Indigenous people.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Melbourne verse expressed a solemn, ironic, concern for social and moral issues and, in the work of Vincent Buckley and Chris Wallace Crabb, an academic literariness. Whereas in Sydney, where Kenneth Slessor, R D Fitzgerald and Douglas Stewart were influential, a more relaxed, popular, and various style of poetry flourished. Kenneth Slessor was probably the most talented poet to have written in Australia at this time.

Other influential poets outside of the east coast capitals were the 'Sandgropers and Islanders' - Dorothy Hewett (1923 - 2002) and Jack Davis (1917 - 2000) from the sand country of Western Australian and Oodgeroo (Kath Walker) (of the tribe Noonuccal) (1920 - 1995), born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska, on Minjerribah, of the Stradbroke Islands.

John Tranter describes the focus of the 1980s and 1990s in Sydney as being a mood 'of passive recollection' which tells of an 'adult life tormented by decay, women gained and lost and dead animals'. Dorothy Hewett's *Greenhouse* (1980) has love and betrayal, death, travel, politics and passion as its subjects.

Dorothy Porter is credited with Australian poetry making a comeback in the late 1990s by re-visiting one of the oldest forms of literature - the verse novel. David Malouf's first poetry collection in 26 years, *Typewriter Music*, was released at the Sydney Writers Festival in June 2007, selling out of its print run of 3,000 in three days.

Other leading contemporary poets include: Les Murray, John Tranter, Fay Zwicky and Billy Marshall-Stoneking and Indigenous authors Bobby Sykes and Samuel Wagan Watson.

Novels

Like other literary forms, early and many later novels were often concerned with the 'quintessential' Australian qualities: convicts, the bush, bushrangers, folklore, tales of pioneering, family sagas, floods, droughts, bushfires, battlers, Aboriginal people, Irishmen and lost children.

Early Australian novelists included: Marcus Clarke, (Stella Maria Sarah) Miles Franklin, Clarence (Clarrie or Den) Michael James Stanislaus (CJ) Dennis, Edward Dyson and Doris Pilkington. The slow, or non-existent, rate of publication did not deter them from continuing to write their poems, books and plays.

A new breed of writers was born in the 20th century. They redefined what could be expected from writing even if they used the same backdrop of the bush as early writers had done. Published in 1901, *My Brilliant Career* by Miles Franklin is often said to be the first authentic Australian novel.

The most eminent fiction writer after 1945 was Patrick White, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1973. In a dozen novels from *Happy Valley* (1939) to *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986), White examined, often satirically, the conflict between inner consciousness and social existence.

In the Miles Franklin tradition, other novelists, particularly the women, relied upon both social realism and also a surreal or imaginary life linked to the everyday lives of their characters.

Christina Stead (1902 - 1983) highly praised novel *The Man Who Loved Children* appeared in 1940. Ruth Park (b. 1922)'s most famous books are the trilogy of *Missus*, *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange*, along with *Swords and Crowns and Rings* which won the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 1977. *The Newspaper of Claremont Street: a Novel* by Elizabeth Jolley (1923 - 2007) relates the story of an old cleaning woman known as The Newspaper, who dreams of escape from the parasitic demands of both her past and her present.

These were followed by David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1996) which was considered by the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award judges to be the best novel written by anyone, anywhere, in any language, in the last three years. Richard Flanagan's (b. 1961, Tasmania) three novels adopted a similar form with great lucidity. Peter Carey's novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*, which evokes the tradition of literary nationalism and the imaginary life of Ned Kelly, was short-listed for the 2001 Miles Franklin Award and won the 2001 Commonwealth Writers Prize, and the 2001 Man Booker Prize.

Children's literature

Australia has a strong tradition of children's books. The earliest books published for children were mostly instructive tales - stories to teach children how to behave. By the late 19th century, Australian writers began to focus on stories showing real life experiences and everyday adventures, such as settling in Australia and family life. Ethel Turner is a well-known writer of that time - her highly successful book, *Seven Little Australians*, was published in 1894.

Some children's books of the early 20th century are now Australian classics, such as Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* and May Gibbs' *Snugglypot and Cuddlepiefie*. Ruth Park also wrote the famous children's series *The Muddle-Headed Wombat*. In the last few decades there has also been a steady growth in the writing of children's literature by authors like May Gibbs, Nan Chauncy, Mem Fox and John Marsden. People such as Pamela Allen, Kerry Argent, Jeannie Baker, Graeme Base, Louise Elliott, Bob Graham and Junko Morimoto have displayed creative abilities as both storytellers and artists.

Today, there is a large diversity of children's books for all ages, including picture books, and books for young and older readers. Awards for children's books, such as the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, celebrate the high quality of children's literature.

Plays and theatre scripts

Australian playwrights were largely ignored for a hundred years or so. Betty Roland had to wait 70 years to see her play performed, as the theatre owners were much more interested in bringing new overseas plays to Australia than taking a risk with local material. *The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife* by Mary Wilkinson was performed briefly in 1922, but the work of Tasmanian Catherine Shepherd has not been performed since its debut in 1942. However, the ABC began radio broadcasts of live drama in 1932, which focused attention on plays.

Since the late 18th century, there has been a number of prominent scripts written for theatre. Notable plays were Alfred Dampier's *His Natural Life* in 1886, Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* in 1912, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* in 1955 and Louis Nowra's *Capricornia* in 1988.

Literary magazines

Australia's literary magazine industry developed rapidly in the late nineteenth century through popular titles such as *The Bulletin*. Australian poetry and writing, in general, in the period from 1890 to 1919 was dominated by a feeling of optimism about Australia's federation, democratic potential and pride in Australia's distinctive society and national character. The weekly magazine *The Bulletin*, founded in Sydney in 1880, reflected this spirit and encouraged the development of a national literature by inviting its readers to contribute fiction and verse of Australian interest.

The bush ballad was the poetic form favoured by *The Bulletin*. The characteristic subjects developed from the early ballads about convict life, gold mining, bushranging, and campfire themes. Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, the duelling banjos of late 19th century Australian writing, came to the fore - explaining and exploring the Australian landscape in verse, ballads and stories.

Meanjin began its publishing life in Brisbane in 1940. The magazine attracted a high calibre of Australian and international writers which, during the 1950s and 1960s, included Xavier Herbert, Katherine Susannah Pritchard, Anais Nin and Jean-Paul Sartre. A range of prints and designs from influential artists such as Margaret Preston and Noel Counihan also appeared in these early editions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, *Meanjin* continued to support both established and emerging writers. Writing by women and migrants to Australia were acknowledged as two important community issues for Australia. Contributors during this period included Bruce Dawe, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Tom Shapcott, Marion Halligan, Les Murray, Patrick White, Tim Winton and Frank Moorhouse.

Quadrant was founded as an initiative of the Australian Committee for Cultural Freedom in 1956 to protect liberty and creativity in the face of the perceived threat of communism. Many of Australia's most prominent poets have appeared in the magazine, however fiction has also been regularly published.

Southerly magazine quickly grew from a four-page bulletin in 1932. Under Kenneth Slessor's editorial stint in the late 1950s, the sub-title *a review of Australian literature* was added and the publication continued to develop as an outlet for academic discussion of local literary issues. It now produces regular editions of up to 200 pages.

Newspapers

Australia's first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* first printed in 1803, was followed by a succession of government and privately-produced newspapers.

By the late 1800s, cheaper wood pulp, improvements in printing technology, railways and streamlined news services all enabled a more efficient and influential newspaper industry. The passing of legislation making education compulsory for children over the age of six years, such as the *Education Act 1872* (Vic) and the *Public Instruction Act of 1880* (NSW), led to increases in literacy as more of the population learnt to read and write.

The Sydney *Sun* was the first daily paper to carry a news story on its front page in 1910 and Melbourne's *Sun News-Pictorial* was the first daily pictorial tabloid (newspaper with pictures) in 1922. Four prominent daily newspapers emerged during this period - *The Age*, the *Argus*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

Clashes with government were not unusual, and newspapers increasingly expressed anti-authoritarian opinions. *The Age* was launched in 1854, during the turmoil of Victoria's gold rush era and prided itself on voicing a radical viewpoint, including support for the miners at Ballarat, the eight-hour working day and reform of land laws.

Australian historian Clive Turnbull proposed that the era of modern journalism began in the 1920s as companies took over control of newspapers and the popularity of a news story became increasingly important. (Source: Turnbull, Clive, 'Journalism' in C H Grattan (ed.) 1947, *Australia*, University of California Press, Berkeley.)

In any form, stories about the 'Australian experience' are still much sought after, despite declining publication lists. Dorothy Porter's verse novels and David Malouf's recent poetry collection outsell their print runs. An increasing number of hopeful novelists attempt their hands at the elusive 'bunyip of Australian Literature ... The Great Australian novel' (A D Hope). The joy is that, in the attempt to capture the congruities and contradictions, there are some wonderful works of literature created.

MODERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY

Modern Australian poetry seeks to tell Australian stories and truths with a poetic significance so that 'they sear into the soul and can never be untold' (Dorothy Porter). The aim for lucidity is also central.

During the 1930s and 1940s there was much debate about Modernist writing and what it meant. In the 1930s, two poetry movements emerged in Adelaide: the Jindyworobaks and the Angry Penguins. The Jindyworobaks encouraged Australian writers to express themselves in language indicating their essence as Australians, whereas the Angry Penguins wanted Australian poetry to become more innovative and international by using surrealism.

The influence of the two movements on Australian poets was profound. In combination with the search for essentially Australian qualities, modernism has contributed to the unique character of Australian poetry. National, urban and social issues have been explored with great lucidity using realist as well as surrealist traditions. The form of modern Australian poetry ranges from sonnets through free verse to the highly successful verse novel.

The Jindyworobaks

In the 1930s a group of poets led by Rex Ingamells called themselves the Jindyworobaks. The Jindyworobaks wanted to develop a distinctive Australian poetry which described the unique Australian landscape in Australian terms, and which incorporated and appropriated elements of Aboriginal culture and the

Aboriginal relationship to the landscape and natural environment.

The Jindyworobak movement continued the spirit of literary nationalism inherited from the early Australian poetry, especially the 1890s. The Jindyworobaks described European culture as a 'Conditional Culture' (1938). The Jindyworobaks maintained that in the oldest of continents, European culture could only be localised with an acceptance of 'place', and then renewed on a higher plane.

A founding member of the Jindyworobaks, Ian Mudie, published a selection of poems *Unabated Spring* in 1942. The Arrente word 'Alcheringa' (spirit of the place) is used more than once amongst his poems. Other Jindyworobak poets, like Roland Robinson (1912 - 1992) in *Legend and Dreaming* (1952) and *Black-feller, White-feller* (1958), used words and symbols from Aboriginal culture as well as transcribing Dreaming stories.

The Angry Penguins and the Ern Malley Affair

During the 1930s and 1940s, a group of young Adelaide poets including Max Harris, Geoffrey Dutton, Sam Kerr and Paul Pfeiffer founded a literary journal called *Angry Penguins*. The Angry Penguins challenged old literary orthodoxies of what constituted literature - based on the new European writings by James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and others.

Harris was well known for his interest in Modernism and perceived Jindyworobak notions as parochial and limiting. He saw in Modernist approaches to writing and poetry the possibility for experimentation, for abstraction and impressionism - an anti-realist approach to poetry. However, the publication of fictional poet Ern Malley's poems by Harris in *Angry Penguins*, and Harris's endorsement of them, was THE greathoax of Australian literary history. Harris was not in on the hoax and experienced an extraordinary level of ridicule for his defence of Malley's work as modern poetry despite any literary merit it may have had.

Post-war giants - A D Hope and Judith Wright

A D Hope was seen as one of the great love poets of the century. 'Love often seemed to him a religious mystery, sex its sacrament. He produced haunting lines like 'You near me, you always, you watchful and invisible one'. (Review by Mark O'Connor.) Alec Hope also explored the pull of religious faith and spirituality, conceding that his strongest statements were better left as questions:

Do other beings inhabit our biosphere

Whose life is one and whole? I cannot tell.

I only know at moments everywhere

I sense their presences in earth and air...

Judith Wright's poem 'Oppositions' from her last collection of poetry *Phantom Dwelling* illustrates the immediacy of her work which struck chords with her readers. It is as if 'the lightning so lightly mentioned in the poem has jumped the page and made some of the ground under me smoke'. The poem is 'lucid - marvelously lucid. Both rich and clear. And indeed beautiful - with a crystalline and precise earthing in the tubby body of the frog.' (Review by Dorothy Porter.)

Judith Wright was the first white Australian poet to publicly name and explore the experiences of its Indigenous people in her poem 'Nigger's Leap', published in her first collection *The Moving Image* (1946). 'Like other great political poets, like

Dante, like Anna Akhmatova, Wright's poetry tells, and tells lucidly, stories and truths that only poetry can really tell so they sear into the soul and can never be untold'. (Dorothy Porter).

Slessor in Sydney, solemnity and satire in the 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950s and 1960s, distinct poetic strains developed in Sydney and in Melbourne. Melbourne verse expressed a solemn, ironic, concern for social and moral issues and, in the work of Vincent Buckley and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, an academic literariness. Francis Webb (1925–1973), from Sydney, produced intense, demanding and often tortured poems.

In Sydney, where Kenneth Slessor, R D Fitzgerald and Douglas Steward were influential, a more relaxed, popular, and various style of poetry flourished.

Kenneth Slessor was:

probably the most talented one to have written in Australia, and the first renovator of twentieth-century Australian poetry. Slessor's career as a poet ran in tandem with his life as a hard-working journalist. He seems to have been able to turn off the raucous babble of everyday Sydney, like a radio, and to produce the piercing, rinsed-clean order of words that characterises his best poetry.

In Sydney, Rosemary Dobson's first book of poems was *In a Convex Mirror* (1944), and her second was *Ship of Ice* (1948). Her work is often reflective and pictorial, and many of her poems are based upon paintings, particularly from the Renaissance. In 1979 she was awarded the Fellowship of Australian Writers Award (then known as the Robert Frost Award).

Gwen Harwood (1920–1995) was born in Brisbane, and moved to Tasmania when she married in 1945, where she raised four children. Her first book was *Poems* (1963), and she published six more books of verse. She was awarded the Robert Frost Poetry Award (1977) and the Patrick White Award (1978). Her fourth book *Bone Scan* (1989) won the Victorian Premier's Literary Prize for poetry.

In Melbourne, Bruce Dawe wrote biting and often funny social and political satires as well as reflecting the realist tradition - showing strong social awareness, with religious overtones. His first book of poems was *No Fixed Address* (1962), a title reminiscent of his own early years. He went on to publish many poetry titles and win many awards including the Dame Mary Gilmore Medal in 1973 and the Patrick White Award in 1980.

Sandgropers and Islanders - Dorothy Hewett, Jack Davis and Oodgeroo

Jack Davis (1917 - 2000) spent his childhood in the Western Australian mill town of Yarloop and began writing when he was 14 years old. He worked as a stockman in the north before returning to Perth and settling into fulltime writing. His first book was *The First Born* (1970), a volume of poetry. *Jagardoo: Poems from Aboriginal Australia* (1978) and *John Pat and Other Poems* (1988) followed. Jack Davis received numerous distinctions including the British Empire Medal, the Order of Australia, and honorary doctorates from the universities of Murdoch and Western Australia.

Dorothy Hewett (1923 - 2002) was raised on her parent's isolated wheat farm in Western Australia. By the time she was 20 she was a prize-winning playwright and poet and had joined the Communist Party. She attended university, travelled to Melbourne and Sydney, worked in factories, left the Communist Party in 1968, and moved permanently to Sydney in 1974. She wrote dozens of successful plays,

books of poems, novels, and memoirs. Among her published works are *Hidden Journey* (1967), *Rapunzal in Suburbia* (1975) and *Alice in Wormland* (1987). Her emotional life was as turbulent as her politics: she had three husbands and six children.

Oodgeroo (1920 - 1995), of the tribe Noonuccal, was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska, on Minjerribah (the Stradbroke Islands) was a domestic servant at the age of 13, and served in the Australian Women's Army Service from 1942 to 1944. Her first book of poetry was *We Are Going* (1964), the first book of published poetry by an Aboriginal Australian. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Mary Gilmore Medal (1970), the Jessie Litchfield Award (1975), and the Fellowship of Australian Writers Award.

Intense and demanding poetic searches, 1980s - 1990s

Prominent poets from this period include David Campbell, John Blight, Bruce Beaver, Les A Murray, David Malouf, John Tranter and Robert Gray.

John Tranter describes the focus of this period in his review of Robert Adamson's *Where I Come From* (1980). The mood is one 'of passive recollection' which tells of an adult life tormented by decay, women gained and lost and dead animals. Adamson 'does not ruminate on history, philosophy or nature, unless it is to search for a mask that he can use to dramatise his life ... he sketches his environment as a backdrop against which he can act out a ritualised search for experience made meaningful in poetic terms'.

Dorothy Hewett's *Greenhouse* (1980) has love and betrayal, death, travel, politics and passion as its subjects although the main source of energy in this book is sexual (John Tranter).

The poetry of snakes and making sense, 1990s

Fay Zwicky (b. 1933) began publishing poetry and short stories as an undergraduate at Melbourne University. She was a concert pianist before becoming a Senior Lecturer in English literature at the University of Western Australia. Fay Zwicky was the winner of the 1982 NSW Premier's Literary Awards for poetry, for *Kaddish and Other Poems* (UQP, 1982), and the 1991 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards, Poetry Award, for *Ask Me* (1990). In 1993 she published the collection *Fay Zwicky: Poems 1970 - 1992* (1993). She won the Patrick White Award in 2005.

Roberta (Bobbi) Sykes (b. 1943) was born and grew up in Townsville. Formally educated to the age of 14, she then completed a Masters degree and then her doctorate in education at Harvard University. While studying, she won the Patricia Weickert Black Writers Award (Australia 1982). In 1994 she won the Australian Human Rights Medal. Her publications include her earlier poetry book *Love Poems and Other Revolutionary Actions* (1988), which has been translated and published in Germany and the three-volume autobiography *Snake Dreaming* (1997 - 2000).

Billy Marshall-Stoneking (b. 1947) is an Australian/American poet/playwright and author of seven books, including *Singing the Snake: Poems from the Western Desert*. In 1988, he was awarded the prestigious Bill Harney Prize for Poetry.

Verse novels

Dorothy Porter (b. 1954) is the author of six collections of poetry and three previous verse novels, *Akhenaten*, *The Monkey's Mask* and *What a Piece of Work*. Dorothy's verse novel *Wild Surmise* (2002) was given the Adelaide Festival Awards 2004 John Bray Memorial Prize for Poetry as well as the overall Premier's Award -

the first book of poetry ever to be awarded this prize and was short-listed for the Miles Franklin Award in 2003. She also worked with the jazz composer Paul Grabowsky, on a song cycle, *Before Time Could Change Us* (2004).

Dorothy Porter is credited with Australian poetry making a comeback in the late 1990s by re-visiting one of the oldest forms of literature - the verse novel. Porter's style is described as 'brash and confronting ... nudging its way onto general best seller lists and threatening to shatter stereotype modern poets'. (Kate Torney).

'My palms sneak up on me', Frank reveals one morning after he's had a sleepless night 'They smell like women going out in puffs of powered and too much scent'

Les A Murray (b. 1938) has received numerous literary awards, including the TS Eliot Award in 1996 and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1999. In addition to poetry and prose, Murray has written two verse novels: *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1979) and *Fredy Neptune: A Novel in Verse* (1999).

He [Murray] is a poet of dispossession and ungainliness as well as of landscape and animals. With great authority his poems hold intellectual, social, personal and religious elements in play, while they take the stubbornly unglamorous perspective of the "poor white" Australian underclass from which he comes. Ruth Padel, The New York Times, May 16 1999 .

Poetry titles from 2000 to 2008

Between 1993 and 1996, more than 250 books of poems were published in Australia each year. By 2006, this figure has been reduced to about 100 titles. The reason stated was that the major publishers could not sustain the maximum sales of between 200 to 400 copies. Bob Sessions of Penguin said that Penguin ditched its poetry list in the 1990s because it wasn't selling. Small independent presses such as Black Pepper, Giramondo and Brandl & Schlesinger have become the home for Australian poetry because it is more feasible for them to produce small print runs (Bronwyn Lea, *Making Books*, University of Queensland Press, 2007).

The exceptions for the major publishers are the verse novels. Dorothy Porter and Steven Herrick recently published verse novels with Picador and Allen and Unwin. Porter's new verse novel *El Dorado*, about a serial killer, sold 4000 copies in its first month. Alan Wearne published *The Lovemakers* (2001), which took out the NSW Premier's Literary Awards for poetry in 2002.

University of Queensland Press maintains five or six poetry titles each year and include John Tranter and David Malouf on their list. David Malouf's first poetry collection in 26 years, *Typewriter Music*, was released at the Sydney Writers Festival in June 2007, selling out of its print run of 3000 in three days.

Performance poetry is re-animating the art form. Miles Merrill is an Australian poet of African-American descent and performs for school students around the country. Merrill is also director of the State Library of New South Wales' 'poetry slam'. Poets have two minutes to impress judges for \$10,000 in prize money. The 2006 New South Wales finalists included a 12-year-old from Broken Hill and a 70-year-old from Armidale. Melbourne is also presenting 'Poetry Idol', which has a grand final at the Melbourne Writer's Festival in September.

Poetry on the Internet is promoted as a way for the future. [*Jacket*](#) is an online poetry e-zine edited until 2010 by John Tranter. A video-only online forum for contemporary poetry, The Continental Review, was launched in June 2007 by Nicholas Manning. John Tranter and others have received \$500,000 to archive

Australian poetry online. The Australian Poetry Centre, funded by the Copyright Agency Limited was open in Melbourne from 2007 to 2010. Australian Poetry, launched in 2011, is a merger between the NSW Poets Union and the Australian Poetry Centre. Writers Now Online is a space for people who love writing in all categories: short stories, novels, scripts and poetry.

2008 onwards - humour and nostalgia

Today, 'we are often told, poetry leads a fugitive existence in Australia, unremunerated, scantily regarded' (Peter Pierce), yet three new Australian poetry collections have been published in 2008.

The Best Australian Poems 2008 edited by Peter Rose has 71 poems by 71 poets, set in alphabetical order

With his selection of 40 poems from 40 poets for *The Best Australian Poetry 2008*, David Brooks notes a commonality in his choice - 'an obsession with a kind of laconic pastoral'. Ross Clark is here for *Danger: Lantana*, which won the poetry prize from the *Australian Book Review* (edited by Rose); Stephen Edgar with *Nocturnal*, a beautiful elegy for Glen Harwood; and Vivian Smith in sparkling form with *The Real Life of Ern Malley*.

According to reviewer Peter Pierce, Jamie Grant's *100 Australian Poems You Need to Know* goes further in exploring 'the key to understanding Australia's national character in its sense of humour'

At the start is the uproarious *A Convict's Tour of Hell* by 'Frank the Poet', which takes us into the infernal regions where his jailers and tormentors are punished. In the colonial period, poetry was a democratic popular entertainment.

Grant has settled for a lightly imposed thematic arrangement: Convict and Stockrider; The Red Page (that is the literary page of the now-vanished *Bulletin*); Gundegai to Ironbark; Bastard and Bushranger; Drought, Dust and War; Country Story; Melbourne and Sydney; Beyond Sprawl (this title from Les Murray's serious piece of hilarity, *The Quality of Sprawl*); and, finally, bringing us to the present, The Generation of XYZ. The collection includes John O'Brien's masterpiece of inconsolable rural gloom, *Said Hanrahan*, a poem once learnt by school children.

THE DREAMING



Reality is a Dream

The Dreaming for Australian Indigenous people (sometimes referred to as the Dreamtime or Dreamtimes) is when the Ancestral Beings moved across the land and created life and significant geographic features.

The Dreaming, or 'Tjukurrpa', also means to 'see and understand the law' as it is translated from the Arrernte language (Frank Gillen with Baldwin Spencer, translating an Arrernte word *Altyerrenge*).

Dreaming stories pass on important knowledge, cultural values and belief systems to later generations. Through song, dance, painting and storytelling which express the dreaming stories, Aborigines have maintained a link with the Dreaming from ancient times to today, creating a rich cultural heritage.

Aborigines have the longest continuous cultural history of any group of people on Earth. Estimates date this history between 50,000 and 65,000 years. Before European settlement of Australia, there were around 600 different Aboriginal nations, based on language groups.

The relationships between land, animals and people

In most stories of the Dreaming, the Ancestor Spirits came to the earth in human form and as they moved through the land, they created the animals, plants, rocks and other forms of the land that we know today. They also created the relationships between groups and individuals to the land, the animals and other people.

Once the ancestor spirits had created the world, they changed into trees, the stars, rocks, watering holes or other objects. These are the sacred places of Aboriginal culture and have special properties. Because the ancestors did not disappear at the end of the Dreaming, but remained in these sacred sites, the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past and the present, the people and the land.

Our story is in the land ... it is written in those sacred places ... My children will look after those places, That's the law. Bill Neidjie, Kakadu elder.

The Creation or Dreaming stories, which describe the travels of the spiritual ancestors, are integral to Aboriginal spirituality. In many areas there are separate spheres of men's and women's stories. Knowledge of the law and of the Dreaming stories is acquired progressively as people proceed through life. Ceremonies, such as initiation ceremonies, are avenues for the passing on of knowledge.

Traditional knowledge, law and religion relies heavily on the Dreaming stories with its rich explanations of land formations, animal behaviour and plant remedies.

Responsibilities

The protocols for social behaviour and consequences, including punishments and disciplines learnt, are also evident in Dreaming stories. 'Virtue in Aboriginal religion lies in the obligation to follow ancestral precedent', which involves keeping the Dreaming stories alive. This takes the forms of painting, song, dancing or ceremony - all of which are therefore necessarily inextricably linked. This is part of a living tradition based on ritual practices. Traditions and practices also merge with economic and ecological responsibilities for 'looking after country'. Looking after country means to continue to express these ritual forms of the Dreaming. Clan groups have the right to use the land regarded as their 'territory' and any of its products, based on their duties to tend the land through the performance of ceremonies.

Ceremonies

The travels and adventures of the ancestral heroes are sometimes told in a sequence of ceremonies, performed by individual clan groups across a large geographic area. For example, the story of the Wagilag Sisters is told by clan groups from across most of Arnhem Land. Individual clan groups have knowledge of the different stories which make up this songline. Ceremonies linked with the initiation of young boys will be performed in sequence from one part of Arnhem Land to the next, following the travels of the Wagilag Sisters.

Creation stories

An example of a Dreaming story is that of the fertility mother of the Gagudju people of Northern Australia:

Life started when a creator woman called Warramurrungundjui came out of the sea and gave birth to the first people and gave them the languages. She carried with her a digging stick and a dilly bag holding yams, waterlilies and other important plants. She planted the food and created waterholes with her digging stick on the ground. Other creator beings appeared...After completing her creative act, Warramurrungundj turned herself into a rock.

The Rainbow Serpent

The serpent as a Creation Being is perhaps the oldest continuing religious belief in the world, dating back several thousands of years. The Rainbow Serpent features in the Dreaming stories of many mainland Aboriginal nations and is always associated with watercourses, such as billabongs, rivers, creeks and lagoons. The Rainbow Serpent is the protector of the land, its people, and the source of all life. However, the Rainbow Serpent can also be a destructive force if it is not properly respected.

The most common version of the Rainbow Serpent story tells that in the Dreaming, the world was flat, bare and cold. The Rainbow Serpent slept under the ground with all the animal tribes in her belly waiting to be born. When it was time, she pushed up, calling to the animals to come from their sleep. She threw the land out, making mountains and hills and spilled water over the land, making rivers and lakes. She made the sun, the fire and all the colours.

To the Gagudju people, the Rainbow Serpent was called Almudj and was a major creator being. It forced passages through rocks and created more waterholes. Today, Almudj is still a great creator, bringing the wet season each year, which causes all forms of life to multiply, and appearing in the sky as a rainbow. But Almudj is also to be feared as he can punish anyone who has broken a law by drowning them in floods. Almudj still lives in a pool under a waterfall in Kakadu.

The Jawoyn people, of the Katherine Gorge area in the Northern Territory, tell how the Rainbow Serpent slept under the ground until she awoke in the Dreaming and pushed her way to the surface. She then traveled the land, sleeping when she tired, and left behind her winding tracks and the imprint of her sleeping body. When she had travelled the earth, she returned and called to the frogs to come out, but they were very slow because their bellies were full of water. The Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs and when the frogs laughed, the water flowed out of their mouths and filled the tracks and hollows left by the Rainbow Serpent, creating the rivers and lakes. This woke all of the animals and plants, who then followed the Rainbow Serpent across the land.

Stories of the stars and sky

To the peoples of the Torres Strait Islands, the Tagai, or warrior, features in most of their dreamtime stories. As the Torres Strait Islanders are sea-faring people, the stories of the Tagai usually focus on stars.

Seas and stars

One Tagai story depicts the Tagai as a man standing in a canoe. In his left hand, he holds a fishing spear, representing the Southern Cross. In his right hand, he holds a sorbi (a red fruit). In this story, the Tagai and his crew of 12 are preparing for a journey. But before the journey begins, the crew consume all the food and drink they planned to take. So the Tagai strung the crew together in two groups of six and cast them into the sea, where their images became star patterns in the sky. These patterns can be seen in the star constellations of Pleiades and Orion.

Other Aboriginal peoples also had Dreaming stories relating to the sky - stars, sun and moon. A Dreaming story from the Flinders Ranges area in South Australia tells how the pointer stars (part of the Southern Cross) came to be. Two young brothers had been hunting and decided to make a campfire when a strong wind blew up. Soon the entire mountain was on fire and the brothers ran to the top of the peak to escape the flames, but the fire caught up to them. Just as they started to burn, the ancestor beings took pity on them and gave them the gift of flight. They flew high up into the night sky, where their camp fires can still be seen today.

Lightning Brothers in the sky

Knowledge of the stars helped people in navigation across the land as well as the seas. Constellations of stars depict figures familiar in the Aboriginal environment like crocodiles and eagles as well as heroic figures like the Lightning Brothers from a Wardaman story.

The Lightning Brothers travelled from the Warlpiri lands of the Northern Territory, stopping at Yirindale Springs before coming to camp at their site known as Yiwalalay. During their travels, the younger brother, Yabiringi, began lusting for Kanayanda (or Gulidang), wife of his older brother, Yagjabula, which ended in a fight between the two brothers. In the Dreamtime story, the older brother is claimed to have decapitated the other with a swing from his special stone axe. Other variations of the legend say that the fight ended when the headdress was knocked off. The Lightning Brothers live in the sky-world, the dwelling place of many ancestral spirits. The brothers are depicted in rock art and paintings.

Stars and family relationships

Knowledge of the constellations or star formations also reflect the patterns for social relationships in some areas. Arrente and Luritja 'skin groupings', which determine people's relationships to one another, are based on the constellations of the Southern Cross. The stars represent a man and a woman ideally suited in marriage, with their parents, children and other relations all marked out in the night sky.

For Warlpiri people, the ancestors broke the Milky Way (called Yiwarra) into individual stars that we see today. Some fragments fell to earth, creating sacred places. This story is re-told in paintings, song and dance as well as re-enacted in contemporary initiation ceremonies, where men wear white down on their bodies to represent the stars (Dianne Johnson, *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia*).

Thus, connections are made on a daily basis between ancestors, people, stars and land. The telling of the Dreaming stories reinforces knowledge about the constellations, social behaviour, land formations and sacred places.

Australian Indigenous cultural heritage

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse. The Indigenous cultures of Australia are the oldest living cultural history in the world - they go back at least 50,000 years and some argue closer to 65,000 years. One of the reasons Aboriginal cultures have survived for so long is their ability to adapt and change over time. It was this affinity with their surroundings that goes a long way to explaining how Aboriginal people survived for so many millennia.

Cultural heritage is seen as 'the total ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is passed from one generation to the next', given to them by reason of their birth.

In Australia, Indigenous communities keep their cultural heritage alive by passing their knowledge, arts, rituals and performances from one generation to another, speaking and teaching languages, protecting cultural materials, sacred and significant sites, and objects.

Land - at the core of belief

Land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The land is not just soil or rocks or minerals, but a whole environment that sustains and is sustained by people and culture. For Indigenous Australians, the land is the core of all spirituality

and this relationship and the spirit of 'country' is central to the issues that are important to Indigenous people today.

All of Australia's Aboriginals were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, with each clan having its own territory from which they 'made their living'. These territories or 'traditional lands' were defined by geographic boundaries such as rivers, lakes and mountains. They understood and cared for their different environments, and adapted to them.

We cultivated our land, but in a way different from the white man. We endeavoured to live with the land; they seemed to live off it. I was taught to preserve, never to destroy. Aborigine Tom Dystra

Indigenous knowledge of the land is linked to their exceptional tracking skills based on their hunter and gather life. This includes the ability to track down animals, to identify and locate edible plants, to find sources of water and fish.

National parks

National parks can contain sites of significance for Aboriginal communities, such as rock engravings and artwork. National parks can be significant for Aboriginal people because of Dreaming stories associated with those sites.

National parks management recognises this intrinsic relationship that Aboriginal people have with their 'country'. The land is often less disturbed by European settlement. Often the land areas have been relatively inaccessible or not suitable for European agricultural practices, or have been left relatively intact.

National Parks and Wildlife Service programs are often run in conjunction with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to ensure Indigenous involvement in national and state parks is seen to be part of processes which help contribute to reconciliation, respect, recognition and cultural awareness, resolution of Native Title, training, employment and enterprise development, support for Aboriginal heritage and cooperative management of the parks and wildlife.

Diversity - location and languages

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders identify themselves through their land areas, their relationship to others and their language and stories - which may be expressed through ceremony, the arts, family, religion, and sports. Cultural heritage is passed on from one generation to the next.

There were about 600 different clan groups or 'nations' around the continent when Europeans arrived, many with distinctive cultures and beliefs. Their 'territories' ranged from lush woodland areas to harsh desert surroundings. Different groups developed different skills and built a unique body of knowledge based on their particular environment.

The system of kinship put everybody in a specific relationship to each other as well special relationships with land areas based on their clan or kin. These relationships have roles and responsibilities attached to them.

Kinship influences marriage decisions and governs much of everyday behaviour. By adulthood people know exactly how to behave, and in what manner, to all other people around them as well as in respect to specific land areas. Kinship is about meeting the obligations of one's clan, and forms part of Aboriginal Law, sometimes known as the Dreaming.

Language is vitally important in understanding Indigenous heritage as much of their history is an oral history. Hundreds of languages and dialects existed (although many are now extinct), and language meaning, as well as geographic location, is used today to identify different groups.

Adaptation - tools and technology

Tools and implements reflect the geographical location of different groups. For example, coastal tribes used fishbone to tip their weapons, whereas desert tribes used stone tips. While tools varied by group and location, Aboriginal people all had knives, scrapers, axe-heads, spears, various vessels for eating and drinking, and digging sticks.

Aboriginal people achieved two world firsts with stone technology. They were the first to introduce ground edges on cutting tools and to grind seed. They used stone tools for many things including: to make other tools, to get and prepare food, to chop wood, and to prepare animal skins.

After European discovery and English colonisation, Aboriginal people quickly realised the advantages of incorporating metal, glass and ceramics. They were easier to work with, gave a very sharp edge, and needed less resharpening.

Sacred sites and Dreaming stories

In most stories of the Dreaming, the Ancestor spirits came to the earth in human form and as they moved through the land, they created the animals, plants, rocks and other forms of the land that we know today. They also created the relationships between groups and individuals to the land, the animals and other people.

Once the ancestor spirits had created the world, they changed into trees, the stars, rocks, watering holes or other objects. These are the sacred places of Aboriginal culture and have special properties. Because the ancestors did not disappear at the end of the Dreaming, but remained in these sacred sites, the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past and the present, the people and the land.

For Aboriginal people all that is sacred is in the land. Knowledge of sacred sites is learned through a process of initiation and gaining an understanding of Aboriginal law. It is, by definition, not public knowledge. This is why the existence of many sites might not be broadcast to the wider world unless they are threatened.

Perhaps the most well-known sacred site in Australia is Uluru. Located in the centre of Australia, southwest of Alice Springs, the first European explorers named it Ayers Rock. The caves inside the rock are covered with Aboriginal paintings. In 1985 the Commonwealth Government of Australia returned Uluru to its traditional owners, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people (also known as Anangu).

Performance - music, songs, dance and ceremony

Ceremonial performances are seen as the core of cultural life. For example, for Tiwi Islanders, these performances bring together all aspects of their art - song, dance, body decoration, sculpture and painting.

Music, song and dance was and is still today a very important part of Aboriginal life and customs. There were songs for every occasion, some of which were expressed in special ceremonies.

Songs and dances were exchanged often at large ceremonial gatherings when many people gathered together and when trade goods were also exchanged. These gatherings often occurred at a time and place when there was plenty of food.

Dance is a unique aspect of ceremonies which is learnt and passed down from one generation to another. To dance is to be knowledgeable about the stories of the ancestral heroes although dancing, unlike painting and singing, is learnt at an early age.

This allows large groups of people to demonstrate their clan rights in front of an audience. Dance is also seen as an occasion to entertain and to be entertained and

through the work of dance to show their love for families and kin. It is for this reason that dance may be performed at the end of every day in some communities.

Visual arts

The quality and variety of Australian Indigenous art produced today reflects the richness and diversity of Indigenous culture and the distinct differences between tribes, languages, dialects and geographic landscapes.

The emergence of 'dot' paintings by Indigenous men from the western deserts of Central Australia in the early 1970s has been called the greatest art movement of the twentieth century. Prior to this, most cultural material by Indigenous Australians was collected by anthropologists. Consequently, collections were found in university departments or natural history museums worldwide, not art galleries. That all changed at a place called Papunya and with what became known as the Papunya Tula art movement of the Western Desert.

Today Indigenous art ranges across a wide variety of mediums from works on paper and canvas to fibre and glass. The story of the way these art forms runs parallel to the history and experiences of the artists themselves. It reflects customary trading patterns, a struggle for survival and the influence of governments and churches.

Dreamtime

In the animist framework of Australian Aboriginal mythology, The Dreaming is a sacred era in which ancestral Totemic Spirit Beings formed The Creation.

"Dreaming" is also often used to refer to an individual's or group's set of beliefs or spirituality. For instance, an indigenous Australian might say that he or she has Kangaroo Dreaming, or Shark Dreaming, or Honey Ant Dreaming, or any combination of Dreamings pertinent to their "country". Many Indigenous Australians also refer to the Creation time as "The Dreaming". The Dreamtime laid down the patterns of life for the Aboriginal people.

Dreaming stories vary throughout Australia, with variations on the same theme. For example, the story of how the birds got their colors is different in New South Wales and in Western Australia. Stories cover many themes and topics, as there are stories about creation of sacred places, land, people, animals and plants, law and custom. It is a complex network of knowledge, faith, and practices that derive from stories of creation. It pervades and informs all spiritual and physical aspects of an indigenous Australian's life.

They believe that every person essentially exists eternally in the Dreaming. This eternal part existed before the life of the individual begins, and continues to exist when the life of the individual ends. Both before and after life, it is believed that this spirit-child exists in the Dreaming and is only initiated into life by being born through a mother. The spirit of the child is culturally understood to enter the developing fetus during the fifth month of pregnancy.

When the mother felt the child move in the womb for the first time, it was thought that this was the work of the spirit of the land in which the mother then stood. Upon birth, the child is considered to be a special custodian of that part of his country and is taught the stories and song lines of that place. As Wolf (1994: p. 14) states: "A black 'fella' may regard his totem or the place from which his spirit came as his Dreaming. He may also regard tribal law as his Dreaming."

It was believed that, before humans, animals, and plants came into being, their 'souls' existed; they knew they would become physical, but not when. And when that time came, all but one of the 'souls' became plants or animals, with the last one becoming human and acting as a custodian or guardian to the natural world around them.

Traditional Australian indigenous peoples embrace all phenomena and life as part of a vast and complex system-reticulum of relationships which can be traced directly back to the ancestral Totemic Spirit Beings of The Dreaming. This structure of relations, including food taboos, had the result of maintaining the biological diversity of the indigenous environment. It may have helped prevent overhunting of particular species.

The Dreaming establishes the structures of society, rules for social behavior, and the ceremonies performed to ensure continuity of life and land. The Dreaming governs the laws of community, cultural lore and how people are required to behave in their communities. The condition that is The Dreaming is met when people live according to law, and live the lore: perpetuating initiations and Dreaming transmissions or lineages, singing the songs, dancing the dances, telling the stories, painting the songlines and Dreamings.

The Creation was believed to be the work of culture heroes who travelled across a formless land, creating sacred sites and significant places of interest in their

travels. In this way songlines were established, some of which could travel right across Australia, through as many as six to ten different language groupings. The songs and dances of a particular songline were kept alive and frequently performed at large gatherings, organised in good seasons.

In the Aboriginal world view, every event leaves a record in the land. Everything in the natural world is a result of the actions of the archetypal beings, whose actions created the world. Whilst Europeans consider these cultural ancestors to be mythical, many Aboriginal people believe in their literal existence. The meaning and significance of particular places and creatures is wedded to their origin in the Dreaming, and certain places have a particular potency, which the Aborigines call its dreaming.

In this dreaming resides the sacredness of the earth. For example, in Perth, the Noongar believe that the Darling Scarp is said to represent the body of a Wagyl - a serpent being that meandered over the land creating rivers, waterways and lakes. It is taught that the Wagyl created the Swan River. In another example, the Gagudju people of Arnhemland, for which Kakadu National Park is named, believe that the sandstone escarpment that dominates the park's landscape was created in the Dreamtime when Ginga (the crocodile-man) was badly burned during a ceremony and jumped into the water to save himself. He turned to stone and became the escarpment. The common theme in these examples and similar ones is that topographical features are either the physical embodiments of creator beings or are the results of their activity.

In one version (there are many Aboriginal cultures), Altjira was the god of the Dreamtime; he created the Earth and then retired as the Dreamtime vanished. Alternative names for Altjira in other Australian languages include Alchera (Arrernte), Alcheringa, Mura-mura (Dieri), and Tjukurpa (Pitjantjatjara).

The dreaming and travelling trails of the Spirit Beings are the songlines (or "Yiri" in the Warlpiri language). The signs of the Spirit Beings may be of spiritual essence, physical remains such as petrosomatoglyphs of body impressions or footprints, amongst natural and elemental simulacra. To cite an example, people from a remote outstation called Yarralin, which is part of the Victoria River region, venerate the spirit Walujapi as the Dreaming Spirit of the black-headed python. Walujapi carved a snakelike track along a cliff-face and left an impression of her buttocks when she sat establishing camp. Both these dreaming signs are still discernible. In the Wangga genre, the songs and dances express themes related to death and regeneration. They are performed publicly with the singer composing from their daily lives or while Dreaming of a nyuidj (dead spirit).

Many non-native writers and artists have been inspired by Dreamtime concepts for film literature and other media projects.

Australian Aboriginal Mythology

Australian Aboriginal myths (also known as Dreamtime stories, Songlines or Aboriginal oral literature) are the stories traditionally performed by Aboriginal peoples within each of the language groups across Australia.

All such myths variously tell significant truths within each Aboriginal group's local landscape. They effectively layer the whole of the Australian continent's topography with cultural nuance and deeper meaning, and empower selected audiences with the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of Australian Aboriginal ancestors back to time immemorial.

Australian Aboriginal mythologies have been characterised as "at one and the same time fragments of a catechism, a liturgical manual, a history of civilization, a

geography textbook, and to a much smaller extent a manual of cosmography."

There are 400 distinct Aboriginal groups across Australia, each distinguished by unique names usually identifying particular languages, dialects, or distinctive speech mannerisms. Each language was used for original myths, from which the distinctive words and names of individual myths derive.

With so many distinct Aboriginal groups, languages, beliefs and practices, scholars cannot attempt to characterise, under a single heading, the full range and diversity of all myths being variously and continuously told, developed, elaborated, performed, and experienced by group members across the entire continent. The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia nevertheless observes: "One intriguing feature of Aboriginal Australian mythology is the mixture of diversity and similarity in myths across the entire continent."

Australian anthropologists willing to generalize suggest Aboriginal myths still being performed across Australia by Aboriginal peoples serve an important social function amongst their intended audiences: justifying the received ordering of their daily lives; helping shape peoples' ideas; and assisting to influence others' behavior. In addition, such performance often continuously incorporates and "mythologies" historical events in the service of these social purposes in an otherwise rapidly changing modern world.

In Australian Aboriginal mythology, The Dreaming or Altjeringa (also called the Dreamtime) is a sacred 'once upon a time' time out of time in which ancestral Totemic Spirit Beings formed The Creation.

The Dreamtime contains many parts: It is the story of things that have happened, how the universe came to be, how human beings were created and how the Creator intended for humans to function within the cosmos.

The expression 'Dreamtime' is most often used to refer to the 'time before time', or 'the time of the creation of all things', while 'Dreaming' is often used to refer to an individual's or group's set of beliefs or spirituality.

For instance, an Indigenous Australian might say that they have Kangaroo Dreaming, or Shark Dreaming, or Honey Ant Dreaming, or any combination of Dreamings pertinent to their 'country'. However, many Indigenous Australians also refer to the creation time as 'The Dreaming'.

What is certain is that 'Ancestor Spirits' came to Earth in human and other forms and the land, the plants and animals were given their form as we know them today.

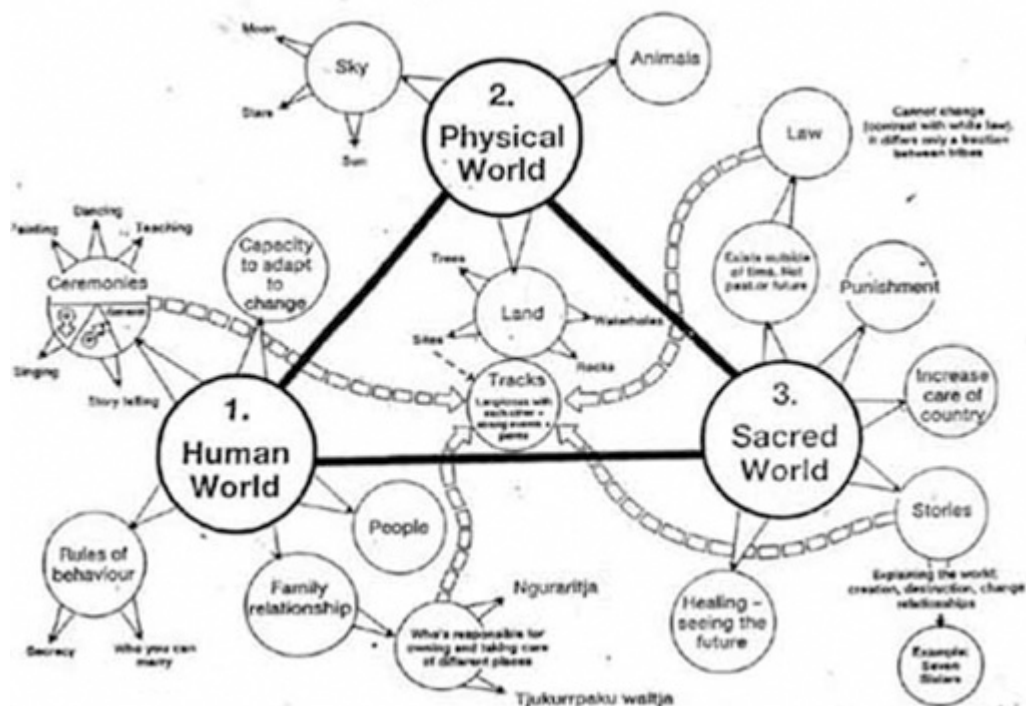
These Spirits also established relationships between groups and individuals, (whether people or animals) and where they traveled across the land, or came to a halt, they created rivers, hills, etc., and there are often stories attached to these places.

Once their work was done, the Ancestor Spirits changed again; into animals or stars or hills or other objects. For Indigenous Australians, the past is still alive and vital today and will remain so into the future. The Ancestor Spirits and their powers have not gone, they are present in the forms into which they changed at the end of the 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming', as the stories tell.

The stories have been handed down through the ages and are an integral part of an Indigenous person's 'Dreaming'.

Each tribe has its individual dreamtime although some of the legends overlap. Most 'Dreamtime' originates with the Giant Dog or the Giant Snake, and each is unique and colorful in its explanation.

Legends of the 'Dreamtime' are handed down by word of mouth and by totem from generation to generation. It involves secret rituals and rites, and some classified as 'Men's Business' and some as 'Women's Business'. Colorful, symbolic and enthusiastic dancing and corroborees are used to pass on the stories of the creation.



The Australian Aborigines speak of *jiva* or *guruwari*, a *seed power* deposited in the earth. In the Aboriginal world view, every meaningful activity, event, or life process that occurs at a particular place leaves behind a vibrational residue in the earth, as plants leave an image of themselves as seeds. The shape of the land - its mountains, rocks, riverbeds, and water holes - and its unseen vibrations echo the events that brought that place into creation. Everything in the natural world is a symbolic footprint of the metaphysical beings whose actions created our world. As with a seed, the potency of an earthly location is wedded to the memory of its origin.

The Aborigines called this potency the "Dreaming" of a place, and this Dreaming constitutes the sacredness of the earth. Only in extraordinary states of consciousness can one be aware of, or attuned to, the inner dreaming of the Earth.

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The Dreaming, Tribal Law, and Songlines

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In Aboriginal mythology, the Wondjina (or wandjina) were cloud and rain spirits who, during the Dream time, painted their images (as humans but without mouths) on cave walls. It has been said if they had mouths, the rain would never cease. They also lacked limbs and had a skull-like face. Their ghosts still exist in small ponds. Walaganda, one of the Wondjina, became the Milky Way. Paintings of this style that represent the mythological beings involved in the creation of the world are called "Wondjina style".

The Wandjinas have common colors of black, red and yellow on a white background. Wandjinas are believed to have made the sea, the earth and all its inhabitants. The existing rock art found, has depicted them as having huge upper bodies and large heads. Their faces show eyes and nose, but typically lack mouths. Around the heads of Wandjinas there appears to be lightning and feathers. The Wandjina is thought to have special powers and if offended, can cause flooding and intense lightning. The paintings are still believed to have special powers and therefore are to be approached cautiously.

What is the ‘Dreamtime’ or the ‘Dreaming’?

English can never capture what ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’ is all about.

The Dreaming is linked to the creation process and spiritual ancestors, and is still around today.

‘Dreamtime’ or ‘Dreaming’ has never been a direct translation of an Aboriginal word. The English language does not know an equivalent to express the complex Aboriginal spiritual concepts to white people.

Aboriginal languages contain a lot of words for spirituality and beliefs, such as

- *tjurkurrpa, jukurrpa, tjurgurba (Pitjantjatjara people, north-western South Australia),*
- *altjeringa, alcheringa, alchera, aldjerinya (Arrernte people, central Australia),*
- *palaneri,*
- *bugaregara,*
- *ngarangani,*
- *ungud (Ngarinyin people, north-Western Australia),*
- *wongar (north eastern Arnhem Land),*
- *bugari (Broome, north-Western Australia).*

There is no spelling orthodoxy because native speakers did not write down Aboriginal languages.

'The Dreaming' or 'the Dreamtime' indicates a psychic state in which or during which contact is made with the ancestral spirits, or the Law, or that special period of the beginning.—Mudrooroo, Aboriginal writer

Aboriginal spirituality does not consider the ‘Dreamtime’ as a time past, in fact not as a time at all. Time refers to past, present and future but the ‘Dreamtime’ is none of these. The ‘Dreamtime’ “is there with them, it is not a long way away. **The Dreamtime is the environment that the Aboriginal lived in**, and it still exists today, all around us”. It is important to note that the Dreaming always also comprises the **significance of place**.

Hence, if we try to use an English word, we should avoid the term ‘Dreamtime’ and **use the word ‘Dreaming’ instead**. It expresses better the timeless concept of moving from ‘dream’ to reality which in itself is an act of creation and the basis of many Aboriginal creation myths. None of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages contain a word for time .

We are the oldest and the strongest people, we're here all of the time, we're constant through the Dreaming which is happening now, there's no such thing as the Dreamtime.—Karl Telfer, senior culture-bearer for Kurna people, Adelaide

Note that the Dreaming is not the product of human dreams. The use of the English word ‘dreaming’ is more of a matter of analogy than translation .

The Dreaming also explains the **creation process**. Ancestor beings rose and roamed the initially barren land, fought and loved, and created the land's features as we see them today. After creating the 'sacred world' the spiritual beings "turned into rocks or trees or a part of the landscape. These became sacred places, to be seen only by initiated men."

The spirits of the ancestor beings are passed on to their descendants, e.g. shark, kangaroo, honey ant, snake and so on and hundreds of others which have become totems within the diverse Indigenous groups across the continent .

It is interesting to note that many Aboriginal people also use the term 'Dreaming' to refer to their concepts about spirituality. This might be because some of them find ceremonies or songs in a state of dreaming, a state between sleeping and waking . Strictly speaking, dreaming and mythology can be considered as the same thing: the deep mental archetypes and images of wisdom which we take on to be guided by them when the conscious mind is in a state of quietness .

The fact that the **Dreaming is still around Aboriginal people** is a fundamental difference to other spiritual beliefs. In Christianity, for example, the spiritual world is 'heaven', and many Christians believe it is reachable only after death and never while the person is still alive. (Those who find heaven inside might disagree, but such a discussion is beyond this article.)

What we draw on from our memories, and think, imagine and create in our daily lives is our dreaming.—Djon Mundine, Bundjalung man and Aboriginal Curator, Campbelltown Arts Centre

Each Aboriginal person identifies with a **specific Dreaming**. It gives them identity, dictates how they express their spirituality (see below) and tells them which other Aboriginal people are related to them in a close family, because those share the same Dreaming . One person can have multiple Dreamings .

Each form shares the spirituality from the 'Dreaming'. It is during ceremonies that the trance-like dreaming state seizes the Aboriginal people and they connect with the ancestral beings .

What is Aboriginal spirituality?

Aboriginal spirituality is deeply linked to the land which “owns” Aboriginal people.

All objects are living and share the same soul or spirit Aboriginal people share.

What is Aboriginal spirituality?

Our spirituality is a oneness and an interconnectedness with all that lives and breathes, even with all that does not live or breathe.

—Mudrooroo, Aboriginal writer

Aboriginal spirituality, Mudrooroo continues, “is a feeling of oneness, of belonging”, a connectedness with “deep innermost feelings”. Everything else is secondary.

Aboriginal spirituality involves the land

Aboriginal spiritual beliefs are invariably about the land Aboriginal people live on. It is ‘geosophical’ (earth-centred) and not ‘theosophical’ (God-centred).

The earth, their country, is “impregnated with the power of the Ancestor Spirits” which Aboriginal people draw upon .

They experience a connection to their land that is unknown to white people. A key feature of Aboriginal spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation which has been passed down as law for thousands of years.

“Spirituality is about tapping into the still places I go to when I’m on country and I feel like I’m part of all the things around me,” explains Senimelia Kingsburra, from the far north Queensland Yarrabah community .

We don't own the land, the land owns us. The land is my mother, my mother is the land. Land is the starting point to where it all began. It's like picking up a piece of dirt and saying this is where I started and this is where I'll go. The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and identity.—S. Knight

Aboriginal author and Yorta Yorta woman Hyllus Maris (1934-86) expressed this connectedness with the land beautifully in her poem Spiritual Song of the Aborigine .

Spiritual Song of the Aborigine

I am a child of the Dreamtime People
Part of this Land, like the gnarled gumtree
I am the river, softly singing
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea
My spirit is the dust-devils
Mirages, that dance on the plain
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain
I'm part of the rocks and the red desert earth
Red as the blood that flows in my veins
I am eagle, crow and snake that glides
Thorough the rain-forest that clings to the mountainside
I awakened here when the earth was new

There was emu, wombat, kangaroo
No other man of a different hue
I am this land
And this land is me
I am Australia.
Poem by Hyllus Maris.

Aboriginal spirituality is the belief that all objects are living and share the same soul or spirit that Aboriginals share.—Eddie Kneebone, Aboriginal Reconciliation campaigner and painter

This is a very fundamental statement about Aboriginal spirituality. It implies that besides animals and plants even rocks have a soul.

An Aboriginal person's soul or spirit is believed to "continue on after our physical form has passed through death", explains Eddie Kneebone . After the death of an Aboriginal person their spirit returns to the Dreamtime from where it will return through birth as a human, an animal, a plant or a rock. The shape is not important because **each form shares the same soul or spirit** from the Dreamtime.

What is not Aboriginal spirituality?

Many texts and books use 'Aboriginal religion' when addressing Aboriginal spirituality. But these two terms should not be confused:

Spiritual "relates to people's deepest thoughts and beliefs, rather than to their bodies and physical surroundings" .

Religious is "something that [...] is about or connected with religion", i.e. "the belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this belief, such as prayer or worship in a church or temple" .

Hence spirituality is the foundation of religion, the deeper layer of any religious practice and expression.

Some little children come in and say 'but God made the world'. And I say, 'Yes, according to the Bible, yes, God did; but according to my spiritual beliefs my rainbow serpent made these things', so we don't have any arguments over that either; they understand: religion is their way, spiritualism is our way. They understand.—Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Aboriginal writer

Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country

‘Welcome to Country’ is an important ceremony by Aboriginal people and inviting them to perform it helps non-Indigenous people recognise Aboriginal culture and history.

An ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ can be done by everyone, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to pay respect to the fact that one is on Aboriginal land.

If you participated in an activity that involved Aboriginal people you might have experienced a **Welcome to Country** or **Acknowledgement of Country**.

Both are protocols that precede the activity. They **recognise the unique position** of Aboriginal people in Australian culture and history and **show respect** for Aboriginal people.

If you are planning to include a ‘Welcome to Country’ or do an ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ make sure to consult with Aboriginal people of the community where the event takes place. This way you ensure that the ceremony pays the appropriate level of recognition and involves the right people.

A ‘Welcome to Country’ is a small ceremony where **traditional owners**, usually elders, welcome people to their land.

This is a significant recognition and is made through a **formal process**, although it’s up to the elder how they decide to carry out the ceremony. It also depends on the location of the event and the practice of the Aboriginal community which can vary greatly according to region.

During a ‘Welcome to Country’ the elders welcome those in attendance, guests, staff and students to their country. It might be just a simple speech or a performance of some sort, like a song, traditional dance, a didgeridoo piece or any combination of these.

‘Welcome to Country’ should always **occur in the opening of the event** in question, preferable as the first item. Note that a ‘Welcome to Country’ is often **considered a right and not a privilege**.

Protocols for welcoming visitors to country have been a **part of Aboriginal culture for thousands of years**.

Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal groups had clear boundaries separating their country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group’s country required a request for permission to enter — like gaining a visa — and when that permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage .

In modern Australia, the ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremony was **first conducted at an official ceremony in 1999** during the NSW Supreme Court’s 175th anniversary, arranged by Chief Justice James Spigelman .

In parliament it was first introduced at the start of parliament in 2008 and **now forms a regular element of Australian political process**.

Welcome to Country from an Aboriginal perspective

Bev Manton, chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC), describes a Welcome to Country from her perspective .

“A Welcome to Country is about Aboriginal people acknowledging the past, and looking to the future. It is often delivered by an Aboriginal person who has

themselves been the victim of government policies.

Our Elders do the Welcome to Country as an act of generosity. These are the same people who have had their children taken away, or been removed themselves. They're the same people who had their wages stolen by successive governments. They're the same people who had ancestors remains raided by grave robbers. They're the same people who were disposed from their lands and forced on to missions and reserves.

And yet despite all of these terrible events—despite the horrendous treatment by so many parliaments—these very same people are still prepared to say 'welcome' to the very people who in some cases have presided over the oppression.”

Charles (Mibunj) Moran, a Bundjalung elder from northern NSW, explains “when we have our welcome to country our custodians/Elders pay respect to custodians past and present as well as Elders past and present.

Spiritually, this is showing respect for the country and the custodians who are responsible for taking care of the country where we live... So what our custodians are doing is trying to give respect back into the country.”

I have come to learn that the Welcome to Country ceremony is such an important aspect of Indigenous Australia... They're unique and special and, in essence, a respectful gesture from the traditional peoples to all people, visitors and friends.—*Matiu Pahi, a Maori from the North Island of New Zealand*

Story: Traditional welcome: Entering country the proper way

Read how a Ngarinyin tribal elder explained a traditional welcome to country :

“Before whitefellas came, it was the tradition of Aboriginals that when strangers came into their particular country to hunt or to gather, or to just pass through on their way to other places, that the host Aboriginals would go out to welcome them.

When they met, there would be the formalities of greeting. Part of the ceremony of welcome would be the men sitting around and talking men's business whilst the host women would take the visiting women and children to a women's site to talk women's business.

When this was completed, the two groups would join again and the men would hunt for kangaroo, goannas or bush turkey - and the women would prepare an area for eating and would gather firewood and berries, fruit, nuts and lily roots for a meal.

Then the ceremonies—the corroborees or jumbas would commence—and the dancing, the singing around the fire could well go on, not only all night, but sometimes for many nights in a row. Each jumba with a message—each with its own story—men, women and children taking part. Whilst during the day, the visiting tribe would be taken and shown the sites of significance and be told the stories of the spirit of the land they would be passing,

In this way, the hosts believed that by the end of formalities, when the strangers were ready to move on - they would not be considered strangers but friends who now had the spirit of the country in their hearts—they carried the Wunggud with them—just like the people who lived there.

They believed that once the spirit of the land was in their hearts, then those people would never damage the land - they would love it and care for it like those whose home country it was...”

Acknowledgement of Country

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a way that all people can show awareness and respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the traditional owners have with their land .

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can perform 'Acknowledgement of Country'. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land (or sea) where the event, meeting, school function or conference takes place. It can be formal or informal.

Sample Acknowledgement of Country where the language group is not known :

*I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land,
of elders past and present, on which this event takes place.*

Sample Acknowledgement of Country using a specific nation :

I would like to acknowledge the Eora people who are the traditional custodians of this land.

I would also like to pay respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

Government, organisations and even small groups are adopting the practice of acknowledging the traditional owners.

For more information contact the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

Acknowledgements of country and traditional owners are something that decent non-Indigenous people give, not because they feel pushed into it but because they believe it is the right thing to do. the case.—Koori Mail

'Acknowledgement of Country' by Jonathan Hill

Today we stand in footsteps millennia old.
May we acknowledge the traditional owners
whose cultures and customs have nurtured,
and continue to nurture, this land,
since men and women
awoke from the great dream.
We honour the presence of these ancestors
who reside in the imagination of this land
and whose irrepressible spirituality
flows through all creation.

Source . Jonathan Hill is an Aboriginal poet living in New South Wales.

Criticism

Some politicians have voiced concern that the 'Acknowledgement of Country' was an "empty" gesture of political correctness and looked "like tokenism" if it was performed too often . The Victorian Premier decided to scrap a requirement for ministers and departmental staff to acknowledge traditional owners in May 2011 .

Government policies which force departments to do 'Acknowledgement of Country' and have 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies performed undermine the genuine gesture and make it "feel false", argues Sue Gordon, a retired West

Australian magistrate .

The Aboriginal community does not share these views.

David Ross, director of the Central Land Council, feels that one should not ignore the “existence and ownership of this land by Aboriginal people before European settlement” and acknowledge the black history with the ritual. Opposing ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremonies would encourage racist elements within the community.

“Our own view is that welcomes to and acknowledgements of country—if conducted in a meaningful , genuine and thoughtful way—are the least we should be able to expect from our visitors to our land,” say the editors of the Koori Mail .

I think it's fantastic [to do Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies], ten years ago we weren't even acknowledged.—Warren Mundine, Indigenous business leader

[Acknowledgement of Country] says to the world, and more importantly to ourselves, that we accept the fact we are in a place that has a history and story far beyond 220 years. It says to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fellow Australians that we are all in the future journey of our country together.—Richard Wynne,

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Victoria

Why are such welcomes and acknowledgements important?

Incorporating a welcome or acknowledgement protocol into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal people as the First Australians and custodians of their land. It promotes an awareness of the past and ongoing connection to place of Aboriginal Australians.

Unlike New Zealand, Canada and the United States, Australia has no treaty with its Aboriginal people.

A Welcome to or Acknowledgement of Country doesn’t replace a treaty, native title or land rights, but they’re a small gesture of recognition of the association with land and place of the First Australians.

Can a welcome or acknowledgement help Aboriginal people?

Aboriginal people are disadvantaged in many areas of their life as statistics show.

But what can be done, alongside efforts in health, education and employment, are practices of inclusion. Including recognition of Aboriginal people in events, meetings and national symbols shows your respect, and respect is a good base on which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians can come closer and eventually reconcile.

Haven’t Aboriginal people lost their land?

All areas of Australia have or had traditional owners, including where there are now large cities.

Even though Aboriginal people may not live in a traditional way on this land, they are still connected to it.

In Aboriginal culture, the meaning of country is more than just ownership or connection to land, as Aboriginal Professor Mick Dodson explains:

“When we talk about traditional ‘country’... we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and

cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains.”

Myths Legends and Fables - Baiame and Creation

An Australian Aboriginal Legend

And again like the Lord God, Baiame walked on the earth he had made, among the plants and animals, and created man and woman to rule over them. He fashioned them from the dust of the ridges, and said, 'These are the plants you shall eat - these and these, but not the animals I have created.'

Having set them in a good place, the All-Father departed.

To the first man and woman, children were born and to them in turn children who enjoyed the work of the hands of Baiame. His world had begun to be populated, and men and women praised Baiame for providing for all their needs. Sun and rain brought life to the plants that provided their sustenance.

All was well in the world they had received from the bountiful provider, until a year when the rain ceased to fall. There was little water. The flowers failed to fruit, leaves fell from the dry, withered stems, and there was hunger in the land--a new and terrifying experience for men, women, and little children who had never lacked for food and drink.

In desperation a man killed some of the forbidden animals, and shared the kangaroo-rats he had caught with his wife. They offered some of the flesh to one of their friends but, remembering Baiame's prohibition, he refused it. The man was ill with hunger. They did their best to persuade him to eat, but he remained steadfast in his refusal. At length, wearying of their importunity, he staggered to his feet, turning his back on the tempting food, and walked away.

Shrugging their shoulders, the husband and wife went on with their meal. Once they were satisfied, they thought again of their friend and wondered whether they could persuade him to eat. Taking the remains of the meal with them, they followed his trail. It led across a broad plain and disappeared at the edge of a river. They wondered how he had crossed it and, more importantly, how they themselves could cross. In spite of the fact that it had dwindled in size, owing to the prolonged drought, it was running too swiftly for them to wade or swim.

They could see him, some little distance away on the farther side, lying at the foot of a tall gum tree. They were on the point of turning back when they saw a coal-black figure, half man half beast, dropping from the branches of the tree and stooping over the man who was lying there. They shouted a warning, but were too far away for him to hear, even if he were awake. The black monster picked up the inert body, carried it up into the branches and disappeared. They could only think that the tree trunk was hollow and that the monster had retreated to its home with his lifeless burden.

One event succeeded another with bewildering rapidity. A puff of smoke billowed from the tree. The two frightened observers heard a rending sound as the tree lifted itself from the ground, its roots snapping one by one, and soared across the river, rising as it took a course to the south. As it passed by they had a momentary glimpse of two large, glaring eyes within its shadow, and two white cockatoos with frantically flapping wings, trying to catch up with the flying tree, straining to reach the shelter of its branches.

Within minutes the tree, the cockatoos, and the glaring eyes had dwindled to a speck, far to the south, far above their heads. For the first time since creation, death had come to one of the men whom Baiame had created, for the monster within the tree trunk was Yowee, the Spirit of Death.

In the desolation of a drought-stricken world, all living things mourned because a man who was alive was now as dead as the kangaroo-rats that had been killed for food.

Baiame's intention for the men and animals he loved had been thwarted. 'The swamp oak trees sighed incessantly, the gum trees shed tears of blood, which crystalized as red gum,' wrote Roland Robinson, in relating this legend of the Kamilroi tribe in his book *Wandjina*. 'To this day,' he continued, 'to the tribes of that part is the Southern Cross known as "Yaraandoo"--the place of the White Gum tree--and the Pointers as "Mouyi", the white cockatoos.'

It was a sad conclusion to the hopes of a world in the making, but the bright cross of the Southern Cross is a sign to men that there is a place for them in the limitless regions of space, the home of the All-Father himself, and that beyond death lies a new creation.

Legend of the Three Sisters Mountain

According to an Aboriginal dreamtime story, the three huge rocks formation were once three beautiful sisters named "Meehni", "Wimlah" and "Gunnedoo" from the Katoomba tribe. The three sisters fell in love with three brothers from the Nepean tribe but their tribal laws forbade their marriage. The three brothers did not accept this law and tried to capture the three sisters by force. This caused a major tribal battle and the lives of the three sisters were thus threatened. A witchdoctor decided to turn the sisters into rocks in order to protect them and thought to reverse the spell only after the battle. Unfortunately, he was killed in the battle and the three sisters remained as the enormous and beautiful rock formations until today. The magnificent formation stands at 922m, 918m, and 906m respectively.

There was a time when everything was still. All the spirits of the earth were asleep - or almost all. The great Father of All Spirits was the only one awake. Gently he awoke the Sun Mother. As she opened her eyes a warm ray of light spread out towards the sleeping earth. The Father of All Spirits said to the Sun Mother, "Mother, I have work for you. Go down to the Earth and awake the sleeping spirits. Give them forms."

The Sun Mother glided down to Earth, which was bare at the time and began to walk in all directions and everywhere she walked plants grew. After returning to the field where she had begun her work the Mother rested, well pleased with herself. The Father of All Spirits came and saw her work, but instructed her to go into the caves and wake the spirits.

This time she ventured into the dark caves on the mountainsides. The bright light that radiated from her awoke the spirits and after she left insects of all kinds flew out of the caves. The Sun Mother sat down and watched the glorious sight of her insects mingling with her flowers. However once again the Father urged her on.

The Mother ventured into a very deep cave, spreading her light around her. Her heat melted the ice and the rivers and streams of the world were created. Then she created fish and small snakes, lizards and frogs. Next she awoke the spirits of the birds and animals and they burst into the sunshine in a glorious array of colors. Seeing this the Father of All Spirits was pleased with the Sun Mother's work.

She called all her creatures to her and instructed them to enjoy the wealth of the earth and to live peacefully with one another. Then she rose into the sky and became the sun.

The living creatures watched the Sun in awe as she crept across the sky, towards the west. However when she finally sunk beneath the horizon they were panic-stricken, thinking she had deserted them. All night they stood frozen in their places, thinking that the end of time had come. After what seemed to them like a lifetime the Sun Mother peeked her head above the horizon in the East. The earth's children learned to expect her coming and going and were no longer afraid.

At first the children lived together peacefully, but eventually envy crept into their hearts. They began to argue. The Sun Mother was forced to come down from her home in the sky to mediate their bickering. She gave each creature the power to change their form to whatever they chose. However she was not pleased with the end result. The rats she had made had changed into bats; there were giant lizards and fish with blue tongues and feet. However the oddest of the new animals was an animal with a bill like a duck, teeth for chewing, a tail like a beavers and the ability to lay egg. It was called the platypus.

The Sun Mother looked down upon the Earth and thought to herself that she must create new creatures lest the Father of All Spirits be angered by what she now saw. She gave birth to two children. The god was the Morning Star and the goddess was the moon. Two children were born to them and these she sent to Earth. They became our ancestors. She made them superior to the animals because they had part of her mind and would never want to change their shape.

Earth Dying - Earth Reborn

Once, the earth was completely dark and silent; nothing moved on its barren surface. Inside a deep cave below the Nullabor Plain slept a beautiful woman, the Sun. The Great Father Spirit gently woke her and told her to emerge from her cave and stir the universe into life. The Sun Mother opened her eyes and darkness disappeared as her rays spread over the land; she took a breath and the atmosphere changed; the air gently vibrated as a small breeze blew.

The Sun Mother then went on a long journey; from north to south and from east to west she crossed the barren land. The earth held the seed potencies of all things, and wherever the Sun's gentle rays touched the earth, there grasses, shrubs and trees grew until the land was covered in vegetation. In each of the deep caverns in the earth, the Sun found living creatures which, like herself, had been slumbering for untold ages. She stirred the insects into life in all their forms and told them to spread through the grasses and trees, then she woke the snakes, lizards, and other reptiles, and they slithered out of their deep hold.

As the snakes moved through and along the earth they formed rivers, and they themselves became creators, like the Sun. Behind the snakes mighty rivers flowed, teeming with all kinds of fish and water life. Then she called for the animals, the marsupials, and the many other creatures to awake and make their homes on the earth.

The Sun Mother then told all the creatures that the days would from time to time change from wet to dry and from cold to hot, and so she made the seasons. One day while all the animals, insects and other creatures were watching, the Sun travelled far in the sky to the west and, as the sky shone red, she sank from view and darkness spread across the land once more. The creatures were alarmed and huddled together in fear. Some time later, the sky began to glow on the horizon to the east and the Sun rose smiling into the sky again. The Sun Mother thus provided a period of rest for all her creatures by making this journey each day.

How The Sun Was Made

For a long time there was no sun, only a moon and stars. That was before there were men on the earth, only birds and beasts, all of which were many sizes larger than they are now.

One day Dinewan the emu and Brolga the native companion were on a large plain near the Murrumbidgee. There they were, quarrelling and fighting. Brolga, in her rage, rushed to the nest of Dinewan and seized from it one of the huge eggs, which she threw with all her force up to the sky. There it broke on a heap of firewood, which burst into flame as the yellow yolk spilled all over it, and lit up the world below to the astonishment of every creature on it. They had been used to the semi-darkness and were dazzled by such brightness.

A good spirit who lived in the sky saw how bright and beautiful the earth looked when lit up by this blaze. He thought it would be a good thing to make a fire every day, and from that time he has done so. All night he and his attendant spirits collect wood and heap it up. When the heap is nearly big enough they send out the morning star to warn those on earth that the fire will soon be lit.

The spirits, however, found this warning was not sufficient, for those who slept saw it not. Then the spirits thought someone should make some noise at dawn to herald the coming of the sun and waken the sleepers. But for a long time they could not decide to whom should be given this office.

At last one evening they heard the laughter of Goo-goor-gaga, the laughing jackass, ringing through the air. "That is the noise we want," they said.

Then they told Goo-goor-gaga that, as the morning star faded and the day dawned, he was every morning to laugh his loudest, that his laughter might awaken all sleepers before sunrise. If he would not agree to do this, then no more would they light the sun-fire, but let the earth be ever in twilight again.

But Goo-goor-gaga saved the light for the world.

He agreed to laugh his loudest at every dawn of every day, and so he has done ever since, making the air ring with his loud cackling, "Goo goor gaga, goo goor gaga, goo goor gaga."

When the spirits first light the fire it does not throw out much heat. But by the middle of the day, when the whole heap of firewood is in a blaze, the heat is fierce. After that it begins to die gradually away until, at sunset, only red embers are left. They quickly die out, except a few the spirits cover up with clouds and save to light the heap of wood they get ready for the next day.

Children are not allowed to imitate the laughter of Goo-goor-gaga, lest he should hear them and cease his morning cry.

If children do laugh as he does, an extra tooth grows above their eye-tooth, so that they carry the mark of their mockery in punishment for it. Well the good spirits know that if ever a time comes when the Goo-goor-gagas cease laughing to herald the sun, then no more dawns will be seen in the land, and darkness will reign once more.

How The Hills Came To Be

Once upon a time the whole country was flat. There were no hills at all. There was a buck kangaroo called Urdlu and a buck euro called Mandya who both lived in the plains called Puthadamathanha. These two used to travel around together in the same country. One of their favourite foods was the wild pear root. In fact, it was they who gave it its name ngarndi wari.

Urdlu the kangaroo and Mandya the euro dug for tucker in separate holes. Urdlu found a lot of tucker, but Mandya found only a little. Urdlu, however, wouldn't tell Mandya where his hole was. Poor Mandya was getting thinner and thinner and Urdlu was getting fatter and fatter. In the end Mandya came to Urdlu and said: "Give me some of your mai" (mai is tucker). Urdlu said to Mandya: "There's some mai in that bag there. You can take that." As he ate it, Mandya said, "This is really good tucker! Where did you get it?" Urdlu said with a wave of his arm, "Oh, I found it over there."

The pair of them went to sleep. In the morning Urdlu got up and went to look for water. While he went around looking here and there for water to drink, Mandya got up and went to find the hole where Urdlu got his tucker. He picked up Urdlu's tracks and followed them. He went along steadily down the track made by the kangaroo until he came to his hole. He dug out a big heap of tucker from it. He was so pleased he stayed there digging and eating without even looking up.

Urdlu came back from having a drink. "Now where on earth has the old fellow got to? I know, he's gone to my hole!" He took off after Mandya. He tracked him. His fresh tracks were there, all the way down to the hole. He could see where Mandya had dug up the dirt as he went along. He sure had dug up the dirt! When Urdlu arrived at the hole Mandya was so busy digging he didn't even see Urdlu coming. Mandya was digging like mad. Urdlu called out, "Why did you come to my hole?" Mandya said he was starving and Urdlu was mean not to tell him where there was tucker. He just went on eating. Now this made Urdlu really angry, so the pair of them were soon having a big fight, all over tucker. Mandya pulled at Urdlu's arms. He stretched his arms, he stretched his fingers, he stretched his legs. They got very long. Then Urdlu pressed Mandya's fingers and his legs; he pressed his back, his chest; he thrashed him. Then they separated.

The wounded Mandya went off to Vadaardlanha to camp. While he was lying there trying to go to sleep, his hip started to hurt. In fact, he had a sore. He reached down and took out a little stone from the sore. He blew on it and in a flash hills came up from the plain. Indeed, several ranges of hills came up. The more Mandya blew, the more hills kept coming up.

Meanwhile Urdlu headed down towards Varaarta (Baratta). He moved that big flat (plain) along as he went. He was lying out there on the flat when he looked back and saw the hills coming down the plain. He said, "Hey! What's the old fellow up to? Over that way there's a big range of hills coming up! If he keeps that up I won't have anywhere to live!" So, with a big sweep of his tail Urdlu pushed the ranges back to where they are now. You can see where this happened, up there north of Vardna-wartathinha. That big flat never gets any grass on it. It's called Urdlurunha-vitana (kangaroo's flat).

Urdlu then made Munda (Lake Frome) so that he would have a permanent supply of water, but Mandya was jealous about this and put salt in it. Right to the present day kangaroos cannot drink from this lake because of the salt.

Mandya was up there in the hills behind Vadaardlanha. From there he looked back and said, "Look at the way the old fellow moved that big plain along!" And as Mandya looked back he turned into a spirit. He is called Thudupinha, and you can see him sitting up there today. Below him the ground is red where his wounds bled after his big fight with Urdlu. This place is called Mandya Arti (which means Mandya's blood).

CHARLES HARPUR

1813 – 1868

Charles Harpur was born at Windsor, New South Wales, on 23 January 1813, the son of emancipated convicts. His father Joseph Harpur was a schoolmaster and clerk at Windsor, who encouraged his children's education, and Charles Harpur would later describe his youthful study of Shakespeare, claiming that his own decision to become a poet was made in his early teens.

The loss of family property as a consequence of drought in the late 1820s saw Harpur travel to the Hunter Valley in search of employment, and by 1833 he had moved to Sydney, where he worked at a series of odd jobs. While in Sydney, Harpur began contributing poems to local newspapers and periodicals. For the rest of his life Harpur remained a prolific contributor of poetry, journalism, and criticism to the colonial press.

In the early 1840s Harpur returned to the Hunter Valley, where he continued to subsist on haphazard employment. At Jerry's Plains in 1843 he met Mary Doyle, the daughter of a wealthy farmer, and after a long courtship the two were married in July 1850. After abandoning plans to become a teacher, Harpur spent most of the 1850s as a grazier on property owned by his father-in-law. In 1853, Harpur published his most significant collection of poetry, *The Bushrangers, a play in five acts, and other poems*. The play, a tragedy in blank verse, was the first by an Australian-born writer to be printed in the country, though its literary merits are generally considered superior to its dramatic qualities.

In 1859, Harpur was appointed assistant gold commissioner at the goldfields in southern New South Wales, and spent the next seven years acting in that capacity. After his appointment expired in 1866, Harpur retired to his farm on the Tuross River, but met with a series of misfortunes; one of his sons died in an accident and the farm was devastated by flooding. Harpur himself became ill with tuberculosis, and died on 8 June 1868.

Harpur was the first Australian writer to attempt to deal seriously with local realities, producing tragedies and epics on Australian subjects at a time when it was generally assumed that Australian material was unsuitable for work in the higher literary genres. Yet he was also one of the most accomplished of those writing comic and satirical poems on political and other local events. At almost the opposite pole from Harpur's often savage satires are his love poems, especially the series of sonnets initially addressed to 'Rosa' (in reality Mary Doyle). Like English writers of the period, Harpur also produced long historical and philosophical poems based on biblical and classical subjects, such as his *The Witch of Hebron* and *The Tower of the Dream*.

Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains

A few thin strips of fleecy cloud lies long
And motionless above the eastern steeps,
Like shreds of silver lace: till suddenly,
Out from the flushing centre to the ends
On either hand, their lustrous layers become
Dipt all in crimson streaked with pink and gold;
And then, at last, are edged as with a band
Of crystal fire. And now, even long before
The Sun himself is seen, off tow'rds the west
A range of mighty summits, more and more,
Blaze, each like a huge cresset, in the keen
Clear atmosphere. As if the Spirit of Light,
Advancing swiftly thence, and eastward still,
Kept kindling then in quick succession; - till
The universal company of cones
And pyramidal peaks, stand burning all
With rosy fires, like a wide ranging circ
Of God-great altars, - and even so announce
The Sun that now, with a vast flash, is seen
Pushing his rim above yon central height.

A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest

Not a sound disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods!

All the birds and insects keep
Where the coolest shadows sleep;
Even the busy ants are found
Resting in their pebbled mound;
Even the locust clingeth now
Silent to the barky bough:
Over hills and over plains
Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Only there's a drowsy humming
From yon warm lagoon slow coming:
Tis the dragon-hornet — see!
All bedaubed resplendently,
Yellow on a tawny ground —
Each rich spot nor square nor round,
Rudely heart-shaped, as it were
The blurred and hasty impress there

Of a vermeil-crustéd seal
Dusted o'er with golden meal.
Only there's a droning where
Yon bright beetle shines in air,
Tacks it in its gleaming flight
With a slanting beam of light,
Rising in the sunshine higher,
Till its shards flame out like fire.

Every other thing is still,
Save the ever-wakeful rill,
Whose cool murmur only throws
Cooler comfort round repose;
Or some ripple in the sea
Of leafy boughs, where, lazily,
Tired summer, in her bower
Turning with the noontide hour,
Heaves a slumbrous breath ere she
Once more slumbers peacefully.

O 'tis easeful here to lie
Hidden from noon's scorching eye,

In the grassy cool recess
Musing thus of quietness.

A Coast View

High 'mid the shelves of a grey cliff, that yet
Riseth in Babylonian mass above,
In a benched cleft, as in the mouldered chair
Of grey-beard Time himself, I sit alone,
And gaze with a keen wondering happiness
Out o'er the sea. Unto the circling bend
That verges Heaven, a vast luminous plain
It stretches, changeful as a lover's dream —
Into great spaces mapped by light and shade
In constant interchange — either neath clouds
The billows darken, or they shimmer bright
In sunny scopes of measureless expanse.
'Tis Ocean dreamless of a stormy hour,
Calm, or but gently heaving; — yet, O God!
What a blind fate-like mightiness lies coiled
In slumber, under that wide-shining face!
While o'er the watery gleam — there were its edge
Banks the dim vacancy, the topmost sails
Of some tall ship, whose hull is yet unseen,
Hang as if clinging to a cloud that still
Comes rising with them from the void beyond,
Like to a heavenly net, drawn from the deep
And carried upward by ethereal hands.

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON

1833 – 1870

Adam Lindsay Gordon was born on 19 October 1833 at Horta, on the island of Faial in the Azores archipelago. His parents were members of the same distinguished Scottish family; his father, Adam Durnford Gordon, was a retired British army officer who had served in the Bengal cavalry, and his mother, Harriet Elizabeth Gordon, the daughter of a British governor in the West Indies.

The family returned to the United Kingdom about 1840, and Adam Lindsay was educated at prestigious schools including the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. In his teenage years, Gordon learned to ride horses, and horseracing and steeplechase riding became for him a life-long passion. At the same time, Gordon also became involved in the racing scene's hard-drinking and gambling lifestyle, which eventually culminated in his removal from the Royal Military Academy.

Through the influence of his father, Gordon secured a position in the South Australian Mounted Police, arriving in the colony in November 1853. He resigned from the police in 1855, and spent several years working as a horse-breaker and steeplechase rider in rural South Australia. The death of Gordon's mother in 1859 brought an inheritance that allowed him to buy property, and in October 1862 he married Margaret Park, a native of Glasgow. Gordon's first published poem, *The Feud*, appeared in the Mount Gambier newspaper *Border Watch* in August 1864.

In 1865, Gordon was elected to a seat in the South Australian parliament, and for the next two years combined a political career with horseracing and writing poetry. In November 1866, Gordon resigned from parliament to become a grazier in Bunbury, Western Australia; this enterprise proved unsuccessful however, and he returned to South Australia a few months later. In 1867, Gordon published two volumes of poetry, *Ashtaroath: A Dramatic Lyric* and *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*, neither of which was a commercial success.

By the end of 1867, Gordon had relocated to Ballarat, Victoria, where he rented a livery stable and joined the Light Horse brigade. In March 1868, Gordon was bed-ridden for weeks after suffering the worst of his many serious riding accidents, and his misery was compounded by the death of his only child in April. His stables having failed, Gordon left Ballarat and spent time racing in various parts of Victoria, and publishing his poems in newspapers and periodicals.

While his feats of horsemanship were becoming legendary and he was feted in the colonial press, numerous riding injuries had taken a physical toll on Gordon, which combined with a series of personal and financial misfortunes, the latest of which was disappointment over a claim to some family property in Scotland. On 24 June 1870, just after the publication of his most famous verse collection *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, Adam Lindsay Gordon committed suicide.

After his death, Gordon's reputation as a poet continued to grow, and in the early twentieth century he was widely regarded as Australia's 'national poet'. While Gordon wrote in a range of poetic forms, he is best remembered for his ballads, which often used horse riding – whether on the racetrack or in the Australian bush – as their main narrative action. Gordon's ballads achieved lasting popularity and had a strong influence on the poets who wrote in the bush ballad tradition of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ye Wearie Wayfarer

Fytte I. — By Wood and Wold.

[A Preamble.]

"Beneath the greenwood bough." — W. Scott.

LIGHTLY the breath of the spring wind blows,
Though laden with faint perfume,
'Tis the fragrance rare that the bushman knows,
The scent of the wattle bloom.
Two-thirds of our journey at least are done,
Old horse! let us take a spell
In the shade from the glare of the noonday sun,
Thus far we have travell'd well;
Your bridle I'll slip, your saddle ungirth,
And lay them beside this log,
For you'll roll in that track of reddish earth,
And shake like a water-dog.

Upon yonder rise there's a clump of trees —
Their shadows look cool and broad —
You can crop the grass as fast as you please,
While I stretch my limbs on the sward;
'Tis pleasant, I ween, with a leafy screen
O'er the weary head, to lie
On the mossy carpet of emerald green,
'Neath the vault of the azure sky;
Thus all alone by the wood and wold,
I yield myself once again
To the memories old that, like tales fresh told,
Come flitting across the brain.

Fytte II. — By Flood and Field.

[A Legend of the Cottiswold.]

*"They have saddled a hundred milk-white steeds,
They have bridled a hundred black." — Old Ballad.*

*"He turned in his saddle, now follow who dare.
I ride for my country, quoth * *." — Lawrence.*

I remember the lowering wintry morn,
And the mist on the Cotswold hills,
Where I once heard the blast of the huntsman's horn,
Not far from the seven rills.
Jack Esdale was there, and Hugh St. Clair,
Bob Chapman and Andrew Kerr,
And big George Griffiths on Devil-May-Care,
And — black Tom Oliver.
And one who rode on a dark-brown steed,

Clean jointed, sinewy, spare,
With the lean game head of the Blacklock breed,
And the resolute eye that loves the lead,
And the quarters massive and square —
A tower of strength, with a promise of speed
(There was Celtic blood in the pair).

I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse,
In a country so deep, with a scent so hot,
That the hound could outpace the horse;
I remember how few in the front rank shew'd,
How endless appeared the tail,
On the brown hill-side, where we cross'd the road,
And headed towards the vale.
The dark-brown steed on the left was there,
On the right was a dappled grey,
And between the pair, on a chestnut mare,
The duffer who writes this lay.
What business had "this child" there to ride?
But little or none at all;
Yet I held my own for a while in "the pride
That goeth before a fall."
Though rashness can hope for but one result,
We are heedless when fate draws nigh us,
And the maxim holds good, "Quem perdere vult
Deus, dementat prius."

The right hand man to the left hand said,
As down in the vale we went,
"Harden your heart like a millstone, Ned,
And set your face as flint;
Solid and tall is the rasping wall
That stretches before us yonder;
You must have it at speed or not at all,
'Twere better to halt than to ponder,
For the stream runs wide on the take-off side,
And washes the clay bank under;
Here goes for a pull, 'tis a madman's ride,
And a broken neck if you blunder."

No word in reply his comrade spoke,
Nor waver'd nor once look'd round,
But I saw him shorten his horse's stroke
As we splash'd through the marshy ground;
I remember the laugh that all the while
On his quiet features play'd: —
So he rode to his death, with that careless smile,
In the van of the "Light Brigade";
So stricken by Russian grape, the cheer
Rang out, while he toppled back,

From the shattered lungs as merry and clear
As it did when it roused the pack.
Let never a tear his memory stain,
Give his ashes never a sigh,
One of many who perished, NOT IN VAIN,
AS A TYPE OF OUR CHIVALRY —

I remember one thrust he gave to his hat,
And two to the flanks of the brown,
And still as a statue of old he sat,
And he shot to the front, hands down;
I remember the snort and the stag-like bound
Of the steed six lengths to the fore,
And the laugh of the rider while, landing sound,
He turned in his saddle and glanced around;
I remember — but little more,
Save a bird's-eye gleam of the dashing stream,
A jarring thud on the wall,
A shock and the blank of a nightmare's dream —
I was down with a stunning fall.

Fytte VIII. — Finis Exoptatus.

[A Metaphysical Song.]

*"There's something in this world amiss
Shall be unriddled by-and-bye." — Tennyson.*

Boot and saddle, see, the slanting
Rays begin to fall,
Flinging lights and colours flaunting
Through the shadows tall.
Onward! onward! must we travel?
When will come the goal?
Riddle I may not unravel,
Cease to vex my soul.

Harshly break those peals of laughter
From the jays aloft,
Can we guess what they cry after?
We have heard them oft;
Perhaps some strain of rude thanksgiving
Mingles in their song,
Are they glad that they are living?
Are they right or wrong?
Right, 'tis joy that makes them call so,
Why should they be sad?
Certes! we are living also,
Shall not we be glad?
Onward! onward! must we travel?
Is the goal more near?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Why so dark and drear?

Yon small bird his hymn outpouring,
On the branch close by,
Recks not for the kestrel soaring
In the nether sky,
Though the hawk with wings extended
Poises over head,
Motionless as though suspended
By a viewless thread.
See, he stoops, nay, shooting forward
With the arrow's flight,
Swift and straight away to nor'ward
Sails he out of sight.
Onward! onward! thus we travel,
Comes the goal more nigh?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Who shall make reply?

Ha! Friend Ephraim, saint or sinner,
Tell me if you can —
Tho' we may not judge the inner,
By the outer man,
Yet by girth of broadcloth ample,
And by cheeks that shine,
Surely you set no example
In the fasting line —

Could you, like yon bird, discov'ring,
Fate as close at hand,
As the kestrel o'er him hov'ring,
Still, as he did, stand?
Trusting grandly, singing gaily,
Confident and calm,
Not one false note in your daily
Hymn or weekly psalm?

Oft your oily tones are heard in
Chapel, where you preach,
This the everlasting burden
Of the tale you teach:
“We are d——d, our sins are deadly,
You alone are heal'd” —
'Twas not thus their gospel redly
Saints and martyrs seal'd.
You had seem'd more like a martyr,
Than you seem to us,
To the beasts that caught a Tartar
Once at Ephesus;
Rather than the stout apostle
Of the Gentiles, who,
Pagan-like, could cuff and wrestle,

They'd have chosen you.

Yet, I ween, on such occasion,
Your dissenting voice
Would have been, in mild persuasion,
Raised against their choice;
Man of peace, and man of merit,
Pompous, wise, and grave,
Ephraim! is it flesh or spirit
You strive most to save?
Vain is half this care and caution
O'er the earthly shell,
We can neither baffle nor shun
Dark plumed Azrael.
Onward! onward! still we wander,
Nearer draws the goal;
Half the riddle's read, we ponder
Vainly on the whole.

Eastward! in the pink horizon,
Fleecy hillocks shame
This dim range dull earth that lies on,
Tinged with rosy flame.
Westward! as a stricken giant
Stoops his bloody crest,
And tho' vanquished, frowns defiant,
Sinks the sun to rest.
Distant, yet approaching quickly,
From the shades that lurk,
Like a black pall gathers thickly,
Night, when none may work.
Soon our restless occupation
Shall have ceas'd to be;
Units! in God's vast creation,
Ciphers! what are we?
Onward! onward! oh! faint-hearted;
Nearer and more near
Has the goal drawn since we started,
Be of better cheer.

Preacher! all forbearance ask, for
All are worthless found,
Man must aye take man to task for
Faults while earth goes round.
On this dank soil thistles muster,
Thorns are broadcast sown;
Seek not figs where thistles cluster,
Grapes where thorns have grown.

Sun and rain and dew from heaven,
Light and shade and air,

Heat and moisture freely given,
Thorns and thistles share.
Vegetation rank and rotten
Feels the cheering ray;
Not uncared for, unforgotten,
We, too, have our day.

Unforgotten! though we cumber
Earth we work His will.
Shall we sleep through night's long slumber
Unforgotten still?
Onward! onward! toiling ever,
Weary steps and slow,
Doubting oft, despairing never,
To the goal we go!

Hark! the bells on distant cattle
Waft across the range;
Through the golden-tufted wattle,
Music low and strange;
Like the marriage peal of fairies
Comes the tinkling sound,
Or like chimes of sweet St. Mary's
On far English ground.
How my courser champs the snaffle,
And with nostril spread,
Snorts and scarcely seems to ruffle
Fern leaves with his tread;
Cool and pleasant on his haunches
Blows the evening breeze,
Through the overhanging branches
Of the wattle trees:
Onward! to the Southern Ocean,
Glides the breath of Spring.
Onward! with a dreary motion,
I, too, glide and sing —
Forward! forward! still we wander —
Tinted hills that lie
In the red horizon yonder —
Is the goal so nigh?

Whisper, spring-wind, softly singing,
Whisper in my ear;
Respite and nepenthe bringing,
Can the goal be near?
Laden with the dew of vespers,
From the fragrant sky,
In my ear the wind that whispers
Seems to make reply —

“Question not, but live and labour

Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
KINDNESS in another's trouble,
COURAGE in your own.”

Courage, comrades, this is certain,
All is for the best —
There are lights behind the curtain —
Gentiles, let us rest.
As the smoke-rack veers to seaward,
From “the ancient clay”,
With its moral drifting leeward,
Ends the wanderer's lay.

HENRY KENDALL

1839 – 1882

Thomas Henry Kendall was born at Ulladulla, New South Wales, on 18 April 1839. He received basic schooling from his parents, Basil and Melinda Kendall, but his early life was difficult, as the family struggled to earn a living. The Kendalls were living on the Clarence River, near Grafton—a backdrop that would later provide a steady source of inspiration for Kendall's poetry - when Basil Kendall died in 1852. In the late 1850s family moved to Sydney, and from 1859 Kendall began contributing poems to literary journals and newspapers, with his first published collection, *Poems and Songs*, appearing in 1862.

Through the 1860s, Kendall remained a steady contributor of poetry to newspapers and journals while also being engaged in a series of clerical positions in government departments. In 1868 he married Charlotte Rutter, and the following year the couple moved to Melbourne, where Kendall attempted to earn a living as a journalist. Kendall's second collection of poetry, *Leaves from Australian Forests*, was published in Melbourne in 1869, but though critically well received the book was not a commercial success. Struggling with alcoholism, poverty, and ill health, Kendall returned to Sydney in 1870, where he continued to live a marginal existence, enduring homelessness and periods in a mental institution.

With the help of friends, Kendall's health began to improve in the mid 1870s, and in 1875 he secured employment as a clerk at a timber business in Camden Haven. With this more settled existence Kendall resumed his literary activities, contributing poems and occasional pieces to the Sydney press. In 1880, Kendall published his last and most successful collection of poems, *Songs from the Mountains*. The following year he secured a government position as a forest ranger, but the demands of constant horseback travel proved too much for his health. Kendall died in Sydney on 1 August 1882.

After his death, Kendall quickly became recognised as one of Australia's finest poets. Kendall's skill with the lyric form invited some contemporaries to compare his work to that of Wordsworth, and he was also noted for his satirical verse. Like Charles Harpur, whose work was a strong influence on Kendall's, Kendall sought to find a uniquely Australian voice in his evocation of the landscape that he knew and loved.

Bell Birds

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling;
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.
Through brakes of the cedar and sycamore bowers
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers.
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.

The silver-voiced bell-birds, the darlings of day-time!
They sing in September their songs of the May-time;
When shadows wax strong and the thunder-bolts hurtle,
They hide with their fear in the leaves of the myrtle;
When rain and the sunbeams shine mingled together,
They start up like fairies that follow fair weather;
And straightway the hues of their feathers unfold
Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.

October, the maiden of bright yellow tresses,
Loiters for love in these cool wildernesses;
Loiters, knee-deep, in the grasses, to listen,
Where dripping rocks gleam and the leafy pools glisten:
Then is the time when the water-moons splendid
Break with their gold, and are scattered or blended
Over the creeks, till the woodlands have warning
Of songs of the bell-bird and wings of the Morning.

Welcome as waters unkissed by the summers
Are the voices of bell-birds to thirsty far-comers.
When fiery December sets foot in the forest,
And the need of the wayfarer presses the sorest,
Pent in the ridges for ever and ever
The bell-birds direct him to spring and to river,
With ring and with ripple, like runnels whose torrents
Are toned by the pebbles and leaves in the currents.

Often I sit, looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sights and the sounds of the wildwood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion,
Lyrics with beats like the heart-beats of Passion;—
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughter
Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest-rafters;
So I might keep in the city and alleys
The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys,
Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.

Mountains

Rifted mountains, clad with forests, girded round by gleaming pines,
Where the morning, like an angel, robed in golden splendour shines;
Shimmering mountains, throwing downward on the slopes a mazy glare
Where the noonday glory sails through gulfs of calm and glittering air;
Stately mountains, high and hoary, piled with blocks of amber cloud,
Where the fading twilight lingers, when the winds are wailing loud;
Grand old mountains, overbeetling brawling brooks and deep ravines,
Where the moonshine, pale and mournful, flows on rocks and evergreens.

Underneath these regal ridges — underneath the gnarly trees,
I am sitting, lonely-hearted, listening to a lonely breeze!
Sitting by an ancient casement, casting many a longing look
Out across the hazy gloaming — out beyond the brawling brook!
Over pathways leading skyward — over crag and swelling cone,
Past long hillocks looking like to waves of ocean turned to stone;
Yearning for a bliss unworldly, yearning for a brighter change,
Yearning for the mystic Aidenn, built beyond this mountain range.

Happy years, amongst these valleys, happy years have come and gone,
And my youthful hopes and friendships withered with them one by one;
Days and moments bearing onward many a bright and beauteous dream,
All have passed me like to sunstreaks flying down a distant stream.
Oh, the love returned by loved ones! Oh, the faces that I knew!
Oh, the wrecks of fond affection! Oh, the hearts so warm and true!
But their voices I remember, and a something lingers still,
Like a dying echo roaming sadly round a far off hill.

I would sojourn here contented, tranquil as I was of yore,
And would never wish to clamber, seeking for an unknown shore;
I have dwelt within this cottage twenty summers, and mine eyes
Never wandered erewhile round in search of undiscovered skies;
But a spirit sits beside me, veiled in robes of dazzling white,
And a dear one's whisper wakens with the symphonies of night;
And a low sad music cometh, borne along on windy wings,
Like a strain familiar rising from a maze of slumbering springs.

And the Spirit, by my window, speaketh to my restless soul,
Telling of the clime she came from, where the silent moments roll;
Telling of the bourne mysterious, where the sunny summers flee
Cliffs and coasts, by man untrodden, ridging round a shipless sea.
There the years of yore are blooming — there departed life-dreams dwell,
There the faces beam with gladness that I loved in youth so well;
There the songs of childhood travel, over wave-worn steep and strand —
Over dale and upland stretching out behind this mountain land.

“Lovely Being, can a mortal, weary of this changeless scene,
Cross these cloudy summits to the land where man hath never been?

Can he find a pathway leading through that wildering mass of pines,
So that he shall reach the country where ethereal glory shines;
So that he may glance at waters never dark with coming ships;
Hearing round him gentle language floating from angelic lips;
Casting off his earthly fetters, living there for evermore;
All the blooms of Beauty near him, gleaming on that quiet shore?

“Ere you quit this ancient casement, tell me, is it well to yearn
For the evanescent visions, vanished never to return?
Is it well that I should wish to leave this dreary world behind,
Seeking for your fair Utopia, which perchance I may not find?
Passing through a gloomy forest, scaling steeps like prison walls,
Where the scanty sunshine wavers and the moonlight seldom falls?
Oh, the feelings re-awakened! Oh, the hopes of loftier range!
Is it well, thou friendly Being, well to wish for such a change?”

But the Spirit answers nothing! and the dazzling mantle fades;
And a wailing whisper wanders out from dismal seaside shades!
“Lo, the trees are moaning loudly, underneath their hood-like shrouds,
And the arch above us darkens, scarred with ragged thunder clouds!”
But the spirit answers nothing, and I linger all alone,
Gazing through the moony vapours where the lovely Dream has flown;
And my heart is beating sadly, and the music waxeth faint,
Sailing up to holy Heaven, like the anthems of a Saint.

THOMAS A. SPENCER

1845 – 1911

Thomas Edward Spencer was born in London on 30 December 1845, the son of Daniel O'Brien, a carpenter, and his wife Ann. The details of his early life are unclear, but it appears that Ann O'Brien remarried a stonemason, Thomas Edward Spencer, whose name Thomas took. After training as a stonemason in London, Spencer visited the goldfields in Victoria in 1863, returning to London the following year after failing to make his fortune. He married Jane Harriet Strew in London in November 1869, and in 1875 the couple emigrated to New South Wales. In Sydney, Spencer went into business as a building contractor, and after being defeated in an attempt to win a seat in the New South Wales legislative assembly in 1894, became involved in industrial arbitration as a representative of employers' bodies.

By the early twentieth century, Spencer had also attained a reputation as a writer, chiefly of humorous verse and prose. From the early 1890s he began contributing prose sketches and poems, generally in the popular bush ballad tradition, to the leading Australian literary journal *The Bulletin*, and he subsequently published two verse collections, *How M'Dougall Topped the Score* (1906), and *Budgerie Ballads* (1908), along with several collections of his short prose.

As with a number of the writers of vernacular verse of the early twentieth century, Spencer's work enjoyed significant popularity in his lifetime, but attracted little sustained critical attention. Spencer died at his home in Glebe, Sydney, on 6 May 1911.

How M'Dougal Topped the Score.

A peaceful spot is Piper's Flat. The folk that live around,
They keep themselves by keeping sheep and turning up the ground.
But the climate is erratic, and the consequences are
The struggle with the elements is everlasting war.
We plough, and sow, and harrow—then sit down and pray for rain;
And then we all get flooded out and have to start again.
But the folk are now rejoicing as they ne'er rejoiced before,
For we've played Molongo cricket, and M'Dougal topped the score!

Molongo had a head on it, and challenged us to play
A single-innings match for lunch—the losing team to pay.
We were not great guns at cricket, but we couldn't well say No,
So we all began to practise, and we let the reaping go.
We scoured the Flat for ten miles round to muster up our men,
But when the list was totalled we could only number ten.
Then up spoke big Tim Brady, he was always slow to speak,
And he said—“What price M'Dougal, who lives down at Cooper's Creek?”

So we sent for old M'Dougal, and he stated in reply
That "he'd never played at cricket, but he'd half a mind to try.
He couldn't come to practice—he was getting in his hay,
But he guessed he'd show the beggars from Molongo how to play."
Now, M'Dougal was a Scotchman, and a canny one at that,
So he started in to practise with a paling for a bat.
He got Mrs. Mac. to bowl him, but she couldn't run at all,
So he trained his sheep dog, Pincher, how to scout and fetch the ball.

Now, Pincher was no puppy; he was old, and worn, and grey;
But he understood M'Dougal, and—accustomed to obey —
When M'Dougal cried out “Fetch it!” he would fetch it in a trice;
But until the word was “Drop it!” he would grip it like a vice.
And each succeeding night they played until the light grew dim;
Sometimes M'Dougal struck the ball—sometimes the ball struck *him*!
Each time he struck, the ball would plough a furrow in the ground,
And when he missed, the impetus would turn him three times round.

The fatal day at length arrived—the day that was to see
Molongo bite the dust, or Piper's Flat knocked up a tree!
Molongo's captain won the toss, and sent his men to bat,
And they gave some leather-hunting to the men of Piper's Flat.
When the ball sped where M'Dougal stood, firm planted in his track,
He shut his eyes, and turned him round, and stopped it—with his *back*!
The highest score was twenty-two, the total sixty-six,
When Brady sent a yorker down that scattered Johnson's sticks.

Then Piper's Flat went in to bat, for glory and renown,
But, like the grass before the scythe, our wickets tumbled down.

“Nine wickets down for seventeen, with fifty more to win!”
Our captain heaved a heavy sigh—and sent M'Dougal in.
“Ten pounds to one you lose it!” cried a barracker from town;
But M'Dougal said “I'll tak' it, mon!” and planked the money down.
Then he girded up his moleskins in a self-reliant style,
Threw off his hat and boots, and faced the bowler with a smile.

He held the bat the wrong side out, and Johnson with a grin,
Stepped lightly to the bowling crease, and sent a “wobbler” in;
M'Dougal spooned it softly back, and Johnson waited there,
But M'Dougal, cryin. “*Fetch it!*” started running like a hare.
Molongo shouted “Victory! He's out as sure as eggs.”
When Pincher started through the crowd, and ran through Johnson's legs.
He seized the ball like lightning; then he ran behind a log,
And M'Dougal kept on running, while Molongo chased the dog.

They chased him up, they chased him down, they chased him round, and then
He darted through a slip-rail as the scorer shouted “Ten!”
M'Dougal puffed; Molongo swore; excitement was intense;
As the scorer marked down “Twenty,” Pincher cleared a barbed-wire fence.
“Let us head him!” shrieked Molongo. “Brain the mongrel with a bat!”
“Run it out! Good old M'Dougal!” yelled the men of Piper's Flat.
And M'Dougal kept on jogging, and then Pincher doubled back,
And the scorer counted “*Forty*” as they raced across the track.

M'Dougal's legs were going fast, Molongo's breath was gone—
But still Molongo chased the dog—M'Dougal struggled on.
When the scorer shouted “*Fifty!*” then they knew the chase could cease;
And M'Dougal gasped out “Drop it!” as *he* dropped within his crease.
Then Pincher dropped the ball, and, as instinctively he knew
Discretion was the wiser plan, he disappeared from view.
And as Molongo's beaten men exhausted lay around.
We raised M'Dougal shoulder-high, and bore him from the ground.

We bore him to M'Ginniss's, where lunch was ready laid,
And filled him up with whisky-punch, for which Molongo paid.
We drank his health in bumpers, and we cheered him three times three,
And when Molongo got its breath, Molongo joined the spree.
And the critics say they never saw a cricket match like that,
When M'Dougal broke the record in the game at Piper's Flat.
And the folk are jubilating as they never did before;
For we played Molongo cricket—and *M'Dougal topped the score!*

MARCUS CLARKE

1846-1881

Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke (24 April 1846 – 2 August 1881) was an Australian novelist and poet, best known for his novel *For the Term of his Natural Life*.

Marcus Clarke was born in London on 24 April 1846 and was educated at Highgate School. He was the only son of William Hislop Clarke. He emigrated to Australia, where his uncle, James Langton Clarke, was a county court judge. He was at first a clerk in the Bank of Australasia, but showed no business ability, and soon proceeded to learn farming at a station on the Wimmera River, Victoria.

He was already writing stories for the *Australian Magazine*, when in 1867 he joined the staff of the Melbourne Argus through the introduction of Dr. Robert Lewins. He briefly visited Tasmania in 1870 at the request of the *Argus* to experience at first hand the settings of articles he was writing on the convict period. *Old Stories Retold* began to appear in the *Australasian* from February. The following month his great novel *His Natural Life* (later called *For the Term of His Natural Life*) commenced serialisation in the *Australasian Journal*. He also became secretary (1872) to the trustees of the Melbourne Public Library and later (1876) Sub (assistant) Librarian. He founded in 1868 the Yorick Club, which soon numbered among its members the chief Australian men of letters. The most famous of his books is *For the Term of his Natural Life* (Melbourne, 1874), a powerful tale of an Australian penal settlement. He also wrote *The Peripatetic Philosopher* (1869), a series of amusing papers reprinted from *The Australasian*; *Long Odds* (London, 1870), a novel; and numerous comedies and pantomimes, the best of which was *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne; Christmas, 1873). In 1869 he married the actress Marian Dunn with whom he had six children.

For the Term of his Natural Life is a "ripping yarn", which at times relies on unrealistic coincidences. The story follows the fortunes of Rufus Dawes, a young man transported for a theft, which he did not commit, from the victim of a mugging - to whom he was actually rendering assistance. The harsh and inhumane treatment meted out to the convicts, some of whom were transported for relatively minor crimes, is clearly conveyed. The conditions experienced by the convicts are graphically described. The novel was based on research by the author as well as a visit to the penal settlement of Port Arthur.

Clarke was an important literary figure in Australia, and was the centre of an important bohemian circle. Among the writers were in contact with him were Victor Daley and George Gordon McCrae.

In spite of his popular success Clarke was constantly involved in pecuniary difficulties, which are said to have hastened his death at Melbourne on 2 August 1881 at the age of 35.

Frank Maldon Robb in 1912 described the latter half of Clarke's preface to Lindsay Gordon's poems as the "great prose poem by Marcus Clarke on the characteristics of the Australian bush." Rather than include Clarke's most well-known but rather laboured "The Wail of the Water", we include this "prose poem".

Preface to the Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon

In historic Europe, where every rood of ground is hallowed in legend and in song, the least imaginative can find food for sad and sweet reflection. When strolling at noon down an English country lane, lounging at sunset by some ruined chapel on the margin of an Irish lake, or watching the mists of morning unveil Ben Lomond, we feel all the charm which springs from association with the past. Soothed, saddened, and cheered by turns, we partake of the varied moods which belong not so much to ourselves as to the dead men who, in old days, sung, suffered, or conquered in the scenes which we survey. But this our native or adopted land has no past, no story. No poet speaks to us. Do we need a poet to interpret Nature's teachings, we must look into our own hearts, if perchance we may find a poet there.

What is the dominant note of Australian scenery? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry—Weird Melancholy. A poem like "L'Allegro" could never be written by an Australian. It is too airy, too sweet, too freshly happy. The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle, in their black gorges, a story of sullen despair. No tender sentiment is nourished in their shade. In other lands the dying year is mourned, the falling leaves drop lightly on his bier. In the Australian forests no leaves fall. The savage winds shout among the rock clefts. From the melancholy gums strips of white bark hang and rustle. The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. Great grey kangaroos hop noiselessly over the coarse grass. Flights of white cockatoos stream out, shrieking like evil souls. The sun suddenly sinks, and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. The natives aver that, when night comes, from out the bottomless depth of some lagoon the Bunyip rises, and, in form like monstrous sea-calf, drags his loathsome length from out the ooze. From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings—Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair. As when among sylvan scenes in places

"Made green with the running of rivers,
And gracious with temperate air,"

the soul is soothed and satisfied, so, placed before the frightful grandeur of these barren hills, it drinks in their sentiment of defiant ferocity, and is steeped in bitterness.

Australia has rightly been named the Land of the Dawning. Wrapped in the midst of early morning, her history looms vague and gigantic. The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day sees vast shadows creeping across the shelterless and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval forest, where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands, and feels, despite his fortune, that the trim utilitarian civilisation which bred him shrinks into insignificance beside the contemptuous grandeur of forest and ranges coeval with an age in which European scientists have cradled his own race.

There is a poem in every form of tree or flower, but the poetry which lives in the trees and flowers of Australia differs from those of other countries. Europe is the home of knightly song, of bright deeds and clear morning thought. Asia sinks beneath the weighty recollections of her past magnificence, as the Sutte sinks, jewel burdened, upon the corpse of dread grandeur, destructive even in its death. America swiftly hurries on her way, rapid, glittering, insatiable even as one of her own giant waterfalls. From the jungles of Africa, and the creeper-tangled groves of the Islands of the South, arise, from the glowing hearts of a thousand flowers, heavy and intoxicating odours—the Upas-poison which dwells in barbaric sensuality. In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness. Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphics of haggard gum-trees, blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds, or cramped with cold nights, when the Southern Cross freezes in a cloudless sky of icy blue. The phantasmagoria of that wild dreamland termed the Bush interprets itself, and the Poet of our desolation begins to comprehend why free Esau loved his heritage of desert sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt.

A. B. PATERSON

1864 – 1941

Andrew Barton Paterson was born on 17 February 1864 at Narrambla, New South Wales, the eldest of seven children of a grazier, Andrew Bogle Paterson, and his wife Rose (née Barton). Paterson, whose childhood nickname was 'Barty', grew up on the family's stations at Buckinbah, near Orange, and later Illalong, in the Yass district. The family faced financial difficulties in the early 1870s, and Paterson's father was forced to sell up and work as a manager for other graziers; 'squatters' facing financial hardship was a theme that would recur later in Paterson's writing. Paterson's childhood was still relatively privileged, however. He learned to ride horses – an activity that remained a passion throughout Paterson's life – and hunt on the family's stations, and he received early schooling at a bush school and from a governess engaged by the family. From 1874, Paterson attended Sydney Grammar School, living during school terms with his grandmother Emily Mary Barton in Gladesville, Sydney. An accomplished poet herself, Emily Barton encouraged her grandson to read and write verse.

After finishing school, Paterson became an articled clerk at a Sydney law firm, and was admitted as a solicitor in 1886. Paterson practised as a solicitor until the early years of the twentieth century, by which time he had also developed a promising literary career. His earliest published work dates from 1885, when he submitted a poem criticising the British war in the Sudan (in which Australian troops were involved) to the *Bulletin*, a new literary journal with an Australian nationalist focus. Over the next decade the increasingly popular and influential *Bulletin* provided an important forum for the publication of Paterson's verse, which appeared under the pseudonym 'The Banjo', adopted from the name of one of his favourite horses.

Though he lived in Sydney for most of his adult life, Paterson retained a lifelong love of the bush, and his verse tended to romanticise rural Australia and the figure of the outback 'Bushman'. He was influenced by the work of his friend John Farrell, whose comic ballads drawing on Australian vernacular idioms were also popular in the *Bulletin*. In its thematic emphasis on the courage and energy of Australian bushmen and their prowess at horsemanship, Paterson's poetry can also be compared to that of Adam Lindsay Gordon. Paterson's verse style was simpler than that of Gordon, however, and in his poetry the bushman was a similarly uncomplicated figure – tough, independent, masculine, resourceful – a kind of heroic underdog. Paterson's representation of the bushman as an iconic figure exemplifying what were seen as the ideal traits of Australian national character was enthusiastically received, though his rosy depictions of bush life were challenged by other writers. In the pages of the *Bulletin* through 1892 Paterson was involved in a more or less good-natured poetic 'debate' with his contemporary Henry Lawson, and other writers, over the relative merits of rural and city life, with 'The Banjo' defending life in the bush while Lawson focused on its hardships. In 1895, while on a trip to western Queensland, Paterson wrote the lyrics to what would become his best-known representation of the underdog bushman, *Waltzing Matilda*.

In October 1895, Sydney booksellers Angus and Robertson published a collection of Paterson's verse, drawn mainly from his contributions to the *Bulletin*, under the title *The Man from Snowy River and other verses*. The work was a huge

success, selling more than 13,000 copies within two years of its publication, and 'Banjo' Paterson became a national celebrity. Over the next few years, Paterson travelled through the Northern Territory, writing about his experiences in verse and prose published in newspapers and literary journals. Paterson's growing reputation as a writer and sportsman also elevated his position in the Sydney social scene, and he enjoyed the company of the leading literary men of the day.

In 1899, Paterson was appointed as a special correspondent covering the Boer War for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Melbourne Argus; he also assisted the Australian and British forces as an expert on horses for the cavalry divisions. Paterson, determined to pursue a career as a journalist, then visited China and England in 1901 as a correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. On his return to Australia in 1902, Paterson published a second collection of poetry, *Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Poems*, which included a number of ballads based on his Boer War experiences. Paterson was appointed editor of the *Sydney Evening News* in 1903, though still endeavoured to pursue a range of literary activities. In 1905, Angus and Robertson published his edited collection *Old Bush Songs*, an anthology of colonial ballads and folksong that Paterson had begun compiling about 1895. The following year the same publishers issued his novel, *An Outback Marriage*, which had been serialised in newspapers in 1900.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Paterson travelled to England in the hope of obtaining an appointment as a war correspondent. Unsuccessful in this ambition, Paterson served on the western front as a volunteer ambulance driver, and was subsequently commissioned as an officer in the Australian Imperial Force, serving in the Middle East. During the war, a third collection of Paterson's verse, *Saltbrush Bill, J.P., and Other Verses*, was published by Angus and Robertson, along with a selection of his prose pieces, *Three Elephant Power and Other Stories*. In 1921, Paterson's three collections of verse were combined in *The Collected Verse of A. B. Paterson*, a work frequently republished through the twentieth century.

After the war, Paterson returned to journalism. He was editor of the *Sydney Sportsman* from 1921-1930, and contributed racing and sports reports to *Smith's Weekly*. Following his retirement from full-time journalism in 1930, Paterson continued to write, publishing a successful book of children's verse, *The Animals Noah Forgot* (1933), a semi-autobiographical book of journalistic reminiscences, *Happy Dispatches* (1934), and a second novel, *The Shearer's Colt* (1936). Paterson's contribution to literature was recognised with the award of a C.B.E. in 1939. He died in Sydney on 5 February 1941.

The Man from Snowy River

There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away,
And had joined the wild bush horses — he was worth a thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.
All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.

There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,
The old man with his hair as white as snow;
But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up —
He would go wherever horse and man could go.
And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,
No better horseman ever held the reins;
For never horse could throw him while the saddle-girths would stand,
He learnt to ride while droving on the plains.

And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast,
He was something like a racehorse undersized,
With a touch of Timor pony — three parts thoroughbred at least —
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.
He was hard and tough and wiry — just the sort that won't say die —
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,
And the old man said, 'That horse will never do
'For a long and tiring gallop — lad, you'd better stop away,
'Those hills are far too rough for such as you.'
So he waited sad and wistful — only Clancy stood his friend —
'I think we ought to let him come,' he said;
'I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,
'For both his horse and he are mountain bred.'

'He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
'Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough,
'Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,
'The man that holds his own is good enough.
'And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,
'Where the river runs those giant hills between;
'I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam,
'But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen.'

So he went — they found the horses by the big mimosa clump —
They raced away towards the mountain's brow,

And the old man gave his orders, 'Boys, go at them from the jump,
'No use to try for fancy riding now.
'And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right.
'Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,
'For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,
'If once they gain the shelter of those hills.'

So Clancy rode to wheel them — he was racing on the wing
Where the best and boldest riders take their place,
And he raced his stock-horse past them, and he made the ranges ring
With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.
Then they halted for a moment, while he swung the dreaded lash,
But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,
And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,
And off into the mountain scrub they flew.

Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep and black
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,
And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely answered back
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;
And the old man muttered fiercely, 'We may bid the mob good day,
'No man can hold them down the other side.'

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull,
It well might make the boldest hold their breath,
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,
While the others stood and watched in very fear.

He sent the flint stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat —
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.
Through the stringy barks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound,
At the bottom of that terrible descent.

He was right among the horses as they climbed the further hill,
And the watchers on the mountain standing mute,
Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely, he was right among them still,
As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.
Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met
In the ranges, but a final glimpse reveals
On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet,
With the man from Snowy River at their heels.

And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam.
He followed like a bloodhound on their track,
Till they halted cowed and beaten, then he turned their heads for home,
And alone and unassisted brought them back.
But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,
He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;
But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,
For never yet was mountain horse a cur.

And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise
Their torn and rugged battlements on high,
Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze
At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,
And where around the Overflow the reedbeds sweep and sway
To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The man from Snowy River is a household word to-day,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

Clancy of the Overflow

I had written him a letter which I had, for want of better
Knowledge, sent to where I met him down the Lachlan, years ago,
He was shearing when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him,
Just 'on spec', addressed as follows, 'Clancy, of The Overflow'.

And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected,
(And I think the same was written with a thumb-nail dipped in tar)
'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, and *verbatim* I will quote it:
'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are.'

In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy
Gone a-droving 'down the Cooper' where the Western drovers go;
As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing,
For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know.

And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
And at night the wond'rous glory of the everlasting stars.

I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy
Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,
And the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all.

And in place of lowing cattle, I can hear the fiendish rattle
Of the tramways and the 'buses making hurry down the street,
And the language uninviting of the gutter children fighting,
Comes fitfully and faintly through the ceaseless tramp of feet.

And the hurrying people daunt me, and their pallid faces haunt me
As they shoulder one another in their rush and nervous haste,
With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted forms and weedy,
For townsfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste.

And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy,
Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go,
While he faced the round eternal of the cash-book and the journal —
But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy, of 'The Overflow'.

Waltzing Matilda

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled:
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong.
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee.
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag:
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me",
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag:
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Up rode the squatter, mounted on his thoroughbred.
Down came the troopers, one, two, and three.
"Whose is that jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me",
"Whose is that jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

Up jumped the swagman and sprang into the billabong.
Drowning himself by the coolibah tree
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me",
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me?"

The Travelling Post Office

The roving breezes come and go, the reed beds sweep and sway,
The sleepy river murmurs low, and loiters on its way,
It is the land of lots o' time along the Castlereagh.

The old man's son had left the farm, he found it dull and slow,
He drifted to the great North-west where all the rovers go.
'He's gone so long,' the old man said, 'he's dropped right out of mind,
'But if you'd write a line to him I'd take it very kind;
'He's shearing here and fencing there, a kind of waif and stray,
He's droving now with Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh.

'The sheep are travelling for the grass, and travelling very slow;
'They may be at Mundooran now, or past the Overflow,
'Or tramping down the black soil flats across by Waddiwong,
'But all those little country towns would send the letter wrong,
'The mailman, if he's extra tired, would pass them in his sleep,
'It's safest to address the note to 'Care of Conroy's sheep',
'For five and twenty thousand head can scarcely go astray,
'You write to 'Care of Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh'.'

By rock and ridge and riverside the western mail has gone,
Across the great Blue Mountain Range to take that letter on.
A moment on the topmost grade while open fire doors glare,
She pauses like a living thing to breathe the mountain air,
Then launches down the other side across the plains away
To bear that note to 'Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh'.

And now by coach and mailman's bag it goes from town to town,
And Conroy's Gap and Conroy's Creek have marked it 'further down'.
Beneath a sky of deepest blue where never cloud abides,
A speck upon the waste of plain the lonely mailman rides.
Where fierce hot winds have set the pine and myall boughs asweep
He hails the shearers passing by for news of Conroy's sheep.
By big lagoons where wildfowl play and crested pigeons flock,
By camp fires where the drovers ride around their restless stock,
And past the teamster toiling down to fetch the wool away
My letter chases Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh.

The Geebung Polo Club

It was somewhere up the country, in a land of rock and scrub,
That they formed an institution called the Geebung Polo Club.
They were long and wiry natives from the rugged mountain side,
And the horse was never saddled that the Geebungs couldn't ride;
But their style of playing polo was irregular and rash —
They had mighty little science, but a mighty lot of dash:
And they played on mountain ponies that were muscular and strong,
Though their coats were quite unpolished, and their manes and tails were long.
And they used to train those ponies wheeling cattle in the scrub:
They were demons, were the members of the Geebung Polo Club.

It was somewhere down the country, in a city's smoke and steam,
That a polo club existed, called 'The Cuff and Collar Team'.
As a social institution 'twas a marvellous success,
For the members were distinguished by exclusiveness and dress.
They had natty little ponies that were nice, and smooth, and sleek,
For their cultivated owners only rode 'em once a week.
So they started up the country in pursuit of sport and fame,
For they meant to show the Geebungs how they ought to play the game;
And they took their valets with them — just to give their boots a rub
Ere they started operations on the Geebung Polo Club.

Now my readers can imagine how the contest ebbed and flowed,
When the Geebung boys got going it was time to clear the road;
And the game was so terrific that ere half the time was gone
A spectator's leg was broken — just from merely looking on.
For they waddied one another till the plain was strewn with dead,
While the score was kept so even that they neither got ahead.
And the Cuff and Collar Captain, when he tumbled off to die,
Was the last surviving player — so the game was called a tie.

Then the Captain of the Geebungs raised him slowly from the ground,
Though his wounds were mostly mortal, yet he fiercely gazed around;
There was no one to oppose him — all the rest were in a trance,
So he scrambled on his pony for his last expiring chance,
For he meant to make an effort to get victory to his side;
So he struck at goal — and missed it — then he tumbled off and died.

By the old Campaspe River, where the breezes shake the grass,
There's a row of little gravestones that the stockmen never pass,
For they bear a crude inscription saying, 'Stranger, drop a tear,
For the Cuff and Collar players and the Geebung boys lie here.'
And on misty moonlit evenings, while the dingoes howl around,
You can see their shadows flitting down that phantom polo ground;
You can hear the loud collisions as the flying players meet,

And the rattle of the mallets, and the rush of ponies' feet,
Till the terrified spectator rides like blazes to the pub —
He's been haunted by the spectres of the Geebung Polo Club.

MARY GILMORE

1865–1962

Dame Mary Gilmore DBE (16 August 1865 – 3 December 1962) was a prominent Australian socialist poet and journalist.

Mary Jean Cameron was born on 16 August 1865 at Cotta Walla near Goulburn, New South Wales. When she was one year old her parents, Donald and Mary Ann, decided to move to Wagga Wagga to join her maternal grandparents, the Beatties, who had moved there from Penrith, New South Wales in 1866.

Her father obtained a job as a station manager at a property at Cowabbie, 100 km north of Wagga. A year later, he left that job to become a carpenter, building homesteads on properties in Wagga, Coolamon, Junee, Temora and West Wyalong for the next 10 years. This itinerant existence allowed Mary only a spasmodic formal education; however, she did receive some on their frequent returns to Wagga, either staying with the Beatties or in rented houses.

Her father purchased land and built his own house at Brucedale on the Junee Road, where they had a permanent home. She was then to attend, albeit briefly, Colin Pentland's private Academy at North Wagga Wagga and, when the school closed, transferred to Wagga Wagga Public School for two and a half years. At 14, in preparation to become a teacher, she worked as an assistant at her uncle's school at Yerong Creek.

After completing her teaching exams in 1882, she accepted a position as a teacher at Wagga Wagga Public School, where she worked until December 1885. After a short teaching spell at Illabo she took up a teaching position at Silverton near the mining town of Broken Hill. There Gilmore developed her socialist views and began writing poetry.

In 1890, she moved to Sydney, where she became part of the "*Bulletin* school" of radical writers. Although the greatest influence on her work was Henry Lawson it was Alfred "A. G." Stephens, literary editor of *The Bulletin*, who published her verse and established her reputation as a fiery radical poet, champion of the workers and the oppressed.

She followed William Lane and other socialist idealists to Paraguay in 1896, where they had established a communal settlement called New Australia two years earlier. There she married Billy Gilmore in 1897. By 1902 the socialist experiment had clearly failed and the Gilmore family returned to Australia, where they took up farming near Casterton, Victoria.

Gilmore's first volume of poetry was published in 1910, and for the ensuing half-century she was regarded as one of Australia's most popular and widely read poets. In 1908 she became women's editor of *The Worker*, the newspaper of Australia's largest and most powerful trade union, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU). She was the union's first woman member. The Worker gave her a platform for her journalism, in which she campaigned for better working conditions for working women, for children's welfare and for a better deal for the indigenous

By 1931 Gilmore's views had become too radical for the AWU, but she soon found other outlets for her writing. She later wrote a regular column for the Communist Party's newspaper Tribune, although she was never a party member herself. In spite of her somewhat controversial politics, Gilmore accepted appointment as a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1937,

becoming Dame Mary Gilmore. She was the first person to be granted this award for services to literature. During World War II she wrote stirring patriotic verse such as *No Foe Shall Gather Our Harvest*.

In her later years, Gilmore, separated from her husband, moved to Sydney, and enjoyed her growing status as a national literary icon. Before 1940 she published six volumes of verse and three editions of prose. After the war, Gilmore published volumes of memoirs and reminiscences of colonial Australia and the literary giants of 1890s Sydney, thus contributing much material to the mythologising of that period. Dame Mary Gilmore died in 1962, aged 97, and was accorded the first state funeral accorded to a writer since the death of Henry Lawson in 1922.

Gilmore's image appears on the Australian \$10 note, along with an illustration inspired by *No Foe Shall Gather Our Harvest* and, as part of the copy-protection microprint, the text of the poem itself. The background of the illustration features a portrait of Gilmore by the well-known Australian artist Sir William Dobell.

In 1973 she was honoured on a postage stamp bearing her portrait issued by Australia Post.

The Canberra suburb of Gilmore and the federal electorate of Gilmore are named after her.

Nationality

I have grown past hate and bitterness,
I see the world as one;
But though I can no longer hate,
My son is still my son.

All men at God's round table sit,
And all men must be fed;
But this loaf in my hand,
This loaf is my son's bread.

The Waradgery Tribe

Harried we were, and spent,
broken and falling,
ere as the cranes we went,
crying and calling.

Summer shall see the bird
backward returning;
never shall there be heard
those, who went yearning.

Emptied of us the land;
ghostly our going;
fallen like spears the hand
dropped in the throwing.

We are the lost who went,
like the cranes, crying;
hunted, lonely and spent
broken and dying.

Life's Treasurings

These are life's treasurings:
The sudden sun through rain;
Stars on a frosty night;
Grass rippling o'er the plain;
Tempest grown still;
Hearth-fires when long roads end;
Candle-light in a quiet room;
And the still silence of a friend.

HENRY LAWSON

1867 – 1922

Henry Lawson was born on 17 June 1867 at Grenfell, New South Wales, the eldest child of Louisa Lawson and her husband Niels Hertzberg (Peter) Larsen, a Norwegian immigrant gold prospector and former sailor. The family moved around, following the gold rushes in the Mudgee district, before taking up at selection at Pipeclay Creek, near Eurunderee, in 1873. In 1876, after lobbying by Louisa Lawson, a public school was established at Eurunderee, which the Lawson children attended. The same year, Henry experienced a sudden illness which resulted in a hearing deficiency, a condition which deteriorated into partial deafness in his teenage years. The loss of his hearing, he later wrote, was an event that 'was to cloud my whole life, to drive me into myself, and to be, in a great measure responsible for my writing.' After a few years of frequently interrupted schooling, he went to work with his father, who was by this time working as a building contractor. When his parents separated in 1883, Henry and his siblings went with their mother to Sydney.

In 1884, Lawson was apprenticed as a coach-painter to a railway carriage-works company at Clyde, in the Western suburbs of Sydney, at the same time attending night school to improve his education. It was about this time that Lawson began writing his first poems. From 1887, while supporting himself with odd jobs, Lawson began publishing his verse in the Sydney press, especially the *Bulletin* and *Australian Town and Country Journal*. At the same time he worked on the *Republican*, the radical weekly paper edited and published by his mother. His sympathy for working Australians and strident support of the labour movement, and for an Australian republic, was evident in his early work. In early 1891 he accepted a job on the reporting staff of the Brisbane radical newspaper the *Boomerang*. Though he was in Brisbane for less than a year, Lawson's time as a journalist there honed his abilities to produce verse and prose quickly, and he contributed political and topical poems to the *Boomerang* and to the *Worker*. By the time he returned to Sydney in late 1891, he had decided to make his living as a writer.

In Sydney Lawson lived with his aunt and at various hostels and doss-houses, writing sporadically, and falling into a hard-drinking lifestyle. His work appeared in Sydney papers such as *Truth*, the *Worker* and Louisa Lawson's new weekly *The Dawn*, though the most important outlet for his poetry and stories was the *Bulletin*. In 1892 he was involved in a poetic 'debate' with 'Banjo' Paterson and others, on the merits of the bush versus city lifestyles, with Lawson satirising Paterson's utopian view of bush life in his poem 'The City Bushman.' In September 1892, the *Bulletin* sent Lawson on a trip to Bourke, in western New South Wales, to report first-hand on the lives of bushmen and country workers. This was an important journey for Lawson, who was profoundly moved by the harshness of rural life and the resilience of the people who lived in the drought-stricken outback. By the time he returned to Sydney in mid-1893, he had a store of material and memories that he drew on for many years, and which provided the basis for many of his most celebrated stories and poems. In Sydney he renewed his contacts in socialist circles, and developed friendships with fellow writers including E. J. Brady, Roderic Quinn and Mary Gilmore. In November 1893, Lawson departed for New Zealand where he spent six months, writing for the press in Wellington and Pahiataua and later

working as a telegraph line repairer in the South Island. He returned to Sydney at the end of July 1894 to take up a staff position on the *Daily Worker*, only to find the paper had folded shortly before his arrival. Disappointed, he returned to a hard-living bohemian life, carousing in Sydney's hotels with companions including the poet John Le Gay Brereton.

The end of 1894 saw the publication of Lawson's first collection, *Short Stories in Prose and Verse*, printed by Louisa Lawson on the Dawn's press. The following year, he contracted with the Sydney bookselling firm of Angus and Robertson—who were in the process of publishing 'Banjo' Paterson's collection *The Man From Snowy River*—to publish a volume of his verse. Lawson's *In the Days When the World Was Wide and Other Verses* was published in February 1896, and was followed later that year by a prose collection, *While the Billy Boils and Other Stories*. Both books enjoyed a significant measure of critical and commercial success, but although Paterson had helped him negotiate generous terms with Angus and Robertson, Lawson, desperate for money, sold his copyrights in both books to the publishers and thus received only a limited share in their profits. This was a pattern repeated with later publications, and though the publisher George Robertson generally dealt generously with him—advancing him money over and above the terms they agreed—Lawson's feelings of frustration and resentment at not being able to make an adequate living as a writer began to grow.

In April 1896, flushed with his initial publishing success, Lawson impulsively married Bertha Bredt, the daughter of socialist bookseller and boarding-house proprietor Matilda McNamara. The couple briefly moved to Perth in the hope of joining the gold rushes, but after camping in miserable conditions for a few months they returned to Sydney. With marriage the financial pressures on Lawson increased, but he continued his heavy drinking, and squabbles over his profligacy soon developed between Lawson and Bertha. Lawson interested Angus and Robertson in a mooted novel, but was not able to complete it, instead earning a meagre income selling his stories and poems to the *Bulletin*. In an effort to separate her husband from his drinking companions, Bertha saved money to take the couple to New Zealand in March 1897. Lawson secured employment as a teacher at a small Maori school at Mangamaunu, on the South Island, but quickly tired of the lonely life there and placed his hope once again in a literary career. Back in Sydney in 1898, he found employment as a clerk in the public service, while preparing to publish further collections of his verse and prose with Angus and Robertson. His bohemian excesses also resumed, notably with Victor Daley and the 'Dawn and Dusk Club'. At the end of the year he spent a month at an alcoholic's rehabilitation centre, leaving with an intention to live teetotal. The following year was a productive period for Lawson, leading to the publication of his second poetry collection, *Verses Popular and Humorous*, in 1900.

In April 1900, Lawson fulfilled a long-held wish by departing, with Bertha and their two young children, for England; their passage had been subsidised by contributions from the governor of New South Wales, Earl Beauchamp, and the wealthy bibliophile David Scott Mitchell. Lawson hoped for the kind of literary success in England which he felt the small size of the Australian market had denied him. His career in London began promisingly after he contracted with the prominent literary agent J. B. Pinker, though whom Lawson's writing—including his famous 'Joe Wilson' stories—were placed in influential periodicals like *Blackwood's Magazine*. However, Lawson soon returned to drinking in London, and Bertha suffered a mental breakdown and was hospitalised in an asylum for several months. Desperate for money once again, Lawson's own health deteriorated, the

quality of his work suffered, and the family returned to Sydney in 1902. His failure in London was a setback from which Lawson never fully recovered. He attempted suicide in late 1902, and the following year Bertha obtained a judicial separation from their marriage, citing her husband's habitual drunkenness and alleging physical abuse.

Lawson continued to write and published a number of further collections of poetry and of prose, but critics have generally agreed that after his return to Australia his writing never regained its previous vitality and creative spark. The last twenty years of his life were a sad decline into alcoholism and abject poverty. He had long periods of homelessness, became a beggar on Sydney's streets, was frequently gaoled for non-payment of child support, and spent time in asylums and hospitals for mental illness. The generosity of publishers like George Robertson and J. F. Archibald (of the *Bulletin*), and of numerous friends, sustained Lawson at times, but his health and state of mind continued to decline, and he died of a cerebral haemorrhage on 2 September 1922. He was buried, with a State Funeral, two days later. An iconic figure among Australian writers, Lawson's poetry has received substantially less critical attention than his short stories. Yet his importance within the 'Bush Ballad' school of poetry, so popular in the 1890s and early twentieth century, is clear. His verse never attained any particular sophistication in its structure or expression, but at its best it shares the perceptiveness and clarity of his fiction, and may be placed in the same realist tradition.

In The Days When The World Was Wide

THE world is narrow and ways are short, and our lives are dull and slow,
For little is new where the crowds resort, and less where the wanderers go;
Greater, or smaller, the same old things we see by the dull road-side —
And tired of all is the spirit that sings of the days when the world was wide.

When the North was hale in the march of Time, and the South and the West
were new,
And the gorgeous East was a pantomime, as it seemed in our boyhood's view;
When Spain was first on the waves of change, and proud in the ranks of pride,
And all was wonderful, new and strange in the days when the world was wide.

Then a man could fight if his heart were bold, and win if his faith were true —
Were it love, or honour, or power, or gold, or all that our hearts pursue;
Could live to the world for the family name, or die for the family pride,
Could fly from sorrow, and wrong, and shame in the days when the world was
wide.

They sailed away in the ships that sailed ere science controlled the main,
When the strong, brave heart of a man prevailed as 'twill never prevail again;
They knew not whither, nor much they cared — let Fate or the winds decide —
The worst of the Great Unknown they dared in the days when the world was
wide.

They raised new stars on the silent sea that filled their hearts with awe;
They came to many a strange countree and marvellous sights they saw.
The villagers gaped at the tales they told, and old eyes glistened with pride —
When barbarous cities were paved with gold in the days when the world was
wide.

'Twas honest metal and honest wood, in the days of the Outward Bound,
When men were gallant and ships were good — roaming the wide world round.
The gods could envy a leader then when 'Follow me, lads!' he cried —
They faced each other and fought like men in the days when the world was
wide.

They tried to live as a freeman should — they were happier men than we,
In the glorious days of wine and blood, when Liberty crossed the sea;
'Twas a comrade true or a foeman then, and a trusty sword well tried —
They faced each other and fought like men in the days when the world was
wide.

The good ship bound for the Southern seas when the beacon was Ballarat,
With a 'Ship ahoy!' on the freshening breeze, 'Where bound?' and 'What ship's
that?' —

The emigrant train to New Mexico — the rush to the Lachlan Side —
Ah! faint is the echo of Westward Ho! from the days when the world was wide.

South, East, and West in advance of Time — and, ay! in advance of Thought
Those brave men rose to a height sublime — and is it for this they fought?
And is it for this damned life we praise the god-like spirit that died
At Eureka Stockade in the Roaring Days with the days when the world was
wide?

We fight like women, and feel as much; the thoughts of our hearts we guard;
Where scarcely the scorn of a god could touch, the sneer of a sneak hits hard;
The treacherous tongue and cowardly pen, the weapons of curs, decide —
They faced each other and fought like men in the days when the world was
wide.

Think of it all — of the life that is! Study your friends and foes!
Study the past! And answer this: ‘Are these times better than those?’
The life-long quarrel, the paltry spite, the sting of your poisoned pride!
No matter who fell it were better to fight as they did when the world was wide.

Boast as you will of your mateship now — crippled and mean and sly —
The lines of suspicion on friendship's brow were traced since the days gone by.
There was room in the long, free lines of the van to fight for it side by side —
There was beating-room for the heart of a man in the days when the world was
wide.

With its dull, brown days of a-shilling-an-hour the dreary year drags round:
Is this the result of Old England's power? — the bourne of the Outward Bound?
Is this the sequel of Westward Ho! — of the days of Whate'er Betide?
The heart of the rebel makes answer ‘No! We'll fight till the world grows wide!’

The world shall yet be a wider world — for the tokens are manifest;
East and North shall the wrongs be hurled that followed us South and West.
The march of Freedom is North by the Dawn! Follow, whate'er betide!
Sons of the Exiles, march! March on! March till the world grows wide!

New Life, New Love

THE breezes blow on the river below,
And the fleecy clouds float high,
And I mark how the dark green gum trees match
The bright blue dome of the sky.
The rain has been, and the grass is green
Where the slopes were bare and brown,
And I see the things that I used to see
In the days ere my head went down.

I have found a light in my long dark night,
Brighter than stars or moon;
I have lost the fear of the sunset drear,
And the sadness of afternoon.
Here let us stand while I hold your hand,
Where the light's on your golden head—
Oh! I feel the thrill that I used to feel
In the days ere my heart was dead.

The storm's gone by, but my lips are dry
And the old wrong rankles yet—
Sweetheart or wife, I must take new life
From your red lips warm and wet!
So let it be, you may cling to me,
There is nothing on earth to dread,
For I'll be the man that I used to be
In the days ere my heart was dead!

Middleton's Rouseabout

TALL and freckled and sandy,
Face of a country lout;
This was the picture of Andy,
Middleton's Rouseabout.

Type of a coming nation,
In the land of cattle and sheep,
Worked on Middleton's station,
'Pound a week and his keep.'

On Middleton's wide dominions
Plied the stockwhip and shears;
Hadn't any opinions,
Hadn't any 'idears'.

Swiftly the years went over,
Liquor and drought prevailed;
Middleton went as a drover,
After his station had failed.

Type of a careless nation,
Men who are soon played out,
Middleton was: — and his station
Was bought by the Rouseabout.

Flourishing beard and sandy,
Tall and robust and stout;
This is the picture of Andy,
Middleton's Rouseabout.

Now on his own dominions
Works with his overseers;
Hasn't any opinions,
Hasn't any 'idears'.

CHRISTOPHER BRENNAN

1870 – 1932

Christopher John Brennan was born in Sydney on 1 November 1870, the eldest of five children, to parents who were migrants from Ireland. He was educated at parish schools, and at St Aloysius' College before winning a scholarship to board at St Ignatius College, Riverview, with the expectation of his becoming a priest. At Riverview he read widely and in March 1888 enrolled in Arts at the University of Sydney, specialising in Classics and Philosophy, graduating in 1891 with first class honours and the University Medal in the latter, having also lost his Catholic faith. The following year he completed a MA in Philosophy and won a James King of Irawang Travelling Scholarship to study for his doctorate at the University of Berlin in 1892-94. University work, however, soon took second place to Brennan's immersion in Berlin's cultural and intellectual milieu, where his discovery of the work of French poet Mallarmé led to his decision to 'go in for verse'. In Berlin Brennan also fell in love and became engaged to his landlady's daughter, Anna Elisabeth Werth.

In 1894, Brennan returned to Sydney without his doctorate, and was unable to find work for a year because of the severe economic depression. The next year he was employed as a cataloguer at the Public Library of New South Wales, where he continued to work until 1907. After several temporary teaching appointments in modern languages and classics at the University of Sydney, Brennan was finally offered a permanent position as assistant lecturer in French and German in 1909. Anna Werth had arrived in Sydney in 1897 and they married at the end of that year, but a decade later the marriage had become strained, following the birth of four children and the arrival of Anna's mother and sister to live with the family. Brennan increasingly turned to the cafe society of Sydney where he shone, thanks to his intellect and wit, but which also encouraged his excessive drinking. After his marriage finally broke up in 1922, Brennan went to live with Violet Singer, something which brought him much personal happiness but also resulted in his dismissal from the University – since 1921 he had been associate professor in German – on the grounds of adultery in June 1925. Tragically, Violet had been run down by a tram and killed a few months earlier.

This double loss led to a period of extreme poverty and depression for Brennan. Apart from some occasional money from teaching, he relied on the generosity of friends and former studies. From 1931 he also received a Commonwealth Literary Fund pension. Despite giving up alcohol from 1931, his health continued to deteriorate and he died of cancer on 5 October 1932, having returned to the Catholic faith.

When Brennan decided to 'go in for verse' he also began a spiritual quest for an absolute which he believed could be found through poetry. His major publication *Poems* (1914) is a quest narrative, showing the persona's pursuit of Eden, and has strong autobiographical elements. In form it adheres to Mallarmé's concept of the *livre composé*, a collection of poems conceived and executed as a whole, though with each poem also capable of being read individually.

(When all the ways the worlds have trod)

When all the ways the worlds have trod
are gather'd up in Brahm, who goes
homeward to silence, nor with God
the star-pierced night is faint nor throes,

then all this coil shall fall and sleep:
but then, when seven eternities
are lifted from the awaking deep,
shall then the ways be just as these?

— Wavewise the world is driven for aye,
each gulf the old renewing night,
and evermore each crest (they say)
flings dayward our unwearied might.

So: time should mumble, uninspired,
a crone's burthen, and the divine
triumph on other ways, untired?
that were the world's shame and not mine —

nor anyone's, for none should come
again nor see what he had seen:
to have lived and treasured not the sum
in chemic mind is not to have been.

— A jest! the world was never more
than one attempt if time should yield
some fruit of gold to the great store
or dung to enrich some happier field:

and this shall end and none regret:
hope still: the tranced abysms imprison
so many names unutter'd yet,
so many dawns that have not risen.

**[When window-lamps had dwindled, then I
rose ...]**

When window-lamps had dwindled, then I rose
and left the town behind me; and on my way
passing a certain door I stopt, remembering
how once I stood on its threshold, and my life
was offer'd to me, a road how different
from that of the years since gone! and I had but
to rejoin an olden path, once dear, since left.
All night I have walk'd and my heart was deep awake,
remembering ways I dream'd and that I chose,
remembering lucidly, and was not sad,
being brimm'd with all the liquid and clear dark
of the night that was not stirr'd with any tide;
for leaves were silent and the road gleam'd pale,
following the ridge, and I was alone with night.
But now I am come among the rougher hills
and grow aware of the sea that somewhere near
is restless; and the flood of night is thinn'd
and stars are whitening. O, what horrible dawn
will bare me the way and crude lumps of the hills
and the homeless concave of the day, and bare
the ever-restless, ever-complaining sea?

[The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone ...]

The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone
flaunt standards, and the flood of brazen tone:
I alone linger, a regretful guest,
here where the hostelry has crumbled down,
emptied of warmth and life, and the little town
lies cold and ruin'd, all its bravery done,
wind-blown, wind-blown, where not even dust may rest.
No cymbal-clash warms the chill air: the way
lies stretch'd beneath a slanting afternoon,
the which no piled pyres of the slaughter'd sun,
no silver sheen of eve shall follow: Day,
ta'en at the throat and choked, in the huge slum
o' the common world, shall fall across the coast,
yellow and bloodless, not a wound to boast.
But if this bare-blown waste refuse me home
and if the skies wither my vesper-flight,
'twere well to creep, or ever livid night
wrap the disquiet earth in horror, back
where the old church stands on our morning's track,
and in the iron-entrellis'd choir, among
rust tombs and blazons, where an isle of light
is bosom'd in the friendly gloom, devise
proud anthems in a long forgotten tongue:
so cozening youth's despair o'er joy that dies.

1895

C. J. DENNIS

1876 – 1938

Clarence Michael James Dennis, the eldest child of James Dennis, a hotelier, and his wife Kate (née Tobin), was born on 7 September 1876 at Auburn in the Clare Valley, South Australia. After the death of his mother shortly before his fourteenth birthday, Dennis and his two younger brothers were raised by two aunts, although from 1890 to 1892 he was a boarder at Christian Brothers' College in Adelaide.

Dennis left school at the age of 17, working briefly as a clerk in Adelaide before returning to his father's home in Laura, in the Flinders Ranges. Here he began his first forays in verse, publishing a humorous poem in the *Laura Standard* on some local residents who had become lost in the bush. In the late 1890s, Dennis had a stint as a journalist for the Adelaide weekly *The Critic*, but after about a year he returned to Laura where he worked at his father's hotel. Dennis later claimed it was in these years that he 'learned to drink', a habit that would plague him for the rest of his life. After falling out with his father, Dennis travelled to Broken Hill in western New South Wales, before returning to Adelaide and rejoining the staff of *The Critic*. He continued to submit his poetry to other periodicals, sending several unsuccessful contributions to the *Bulletin* before his poem 'Urry' was published in November 1903.

From February 1906, Dennis teamed up with A. E. Martin to publish the leftwing, pro-nationalist weekly *The Gadfly*. Featuring satirical verse by Dennis, the paper was critically well received but commercially unsuccessful and at the end of 1907 Dennis left the struggling paper and travelled to Victoria. After a period of hard living in Melbourne, he went to live in a hut in the isolated settlement of Toolangi, on the rim of the Yarra Valley. Here Dennis was able to concentrate on his writing. In early 1913 he published his first volume of poetry, *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses*, collected mainly from his earlier work on *The Critic* and *The Gadfly* along with a few newer compositions. This book was not a success and Dennis continued to lead a marginal existence in Toolangi.

From 1913, however, Dennis' fortunes improved thanks to the support of John Garibaldi ('Garry') Roberts, an official with the Melbourne Tramways Company, and his wife Roberta, who were enthusiastic patrons of literature and the arts. Dennis became part of a group of artists and writers who congregated at the Roberts' holiday house 'Sunnyside', at Kallista in the Dandenong Ranges. Dennis divided his time between 'Sunnyside' and Toolangi until 1914 when, tiring of the bush lifestyle, he traveled to Sydney where he worked for the unionist journals *The Call* and *The Australian Worker*. In early 1915, Dennis secured a position as a clerk at the Navy Office in Melbourne, and the following year became secretary to Senator E. J. Russell.

By 1916, his fortunes as a writer had also dramatically improved. In *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses*, Dennis included four interconnected 'verse tales' relating the story of a romance between a Melbourne larrikin and his sweetheart Doreen. The poems were narrated by the protagonist – dubbed 'The Sentimental Bloke' – allowing Dennis to display his facility for vernacular verse in developing the slang idiom of 'the Bloke'. Through 1914 he expanded the series, submitting further 'Bloke' poems to the *Bulletin*, and in 1915 managed to interest the Sydney firm of

Angus and Robertson in publishing the series as *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*. The combination of a vernacular Australian narrative idiom with a sentimental love story appealed to a nation undergoing the strain of its part in the First World War. The book was wildly successful, and Dennis was transformed virtually overnight from 'a frayed little wanderer, battered by hard adventure in bush and city', to the most commercially successful poet in Australian history.

Dennis was quick to capitalise on his success. His next publication, *The Moods of Ginger Mick* (1916), was set within the same imaginative universe: the title character, a Melbourne larrikin become heroic soldier, was a mate of Bill, the 'Sentimental Bloke'. *The Moods of Ginger Mick* was also a great success, and in 1917, Dennis followed it with *Doreen*, a booklet of four poems centered on the domestic happiness of the now married 'Bloke'. Dennis expanded the world of 'the Bloke' again in 1918, with the publication of *Digger Smith*, another romantic verse-story about another soldier mate of 'the Bloke'. In the meantime, Dennis had also published the satire *The Glugs of Gosh* (1917), and republished his first book as *Backblock Ballads and Later Verses* (1918). All these works were published by Angus and Robertson, who enthusiastically collaborated with Dennis in exploiting the latter's popularity, and all featured the illustrations of Hal Gye, whose artwork provided an important complement to Dennis' verses. None of Dennis' publications after 1917 met with anything like the success of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* and *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, but these two works were enough to establish his reputation as 'the laureate of the larrikin'. Mirroring the domestic virtues espoused through his 'Sentimental Bloke' stories, Dennis was also beginning to lead a more settled existence. He used some of the proceeds of his publishing success to purchase land at Toolangi, and in July 1917, Dennis married Olive Price, whom he had met through an artist friend. The Dennis' house at Toolangi was extended and nicknamed 'Arden'.

After the war Dennis continued to publish new work, meeting with various degrees of success. His *Jim of the Hills: A Story in Rhyme* (1919), a verse novel about a solitary backwoodsman finding love, was a commercial disappointment, as was *Rose of Spadgers*, the 1924 sequel to *The Moods of Ginger Mick*. The most enduring work of Dennis' post-war years was his collection of children's verse, *A Book for Kids* (1921), which also contained illustrations by Dennis. Dennis' literary reputation, however, rested largely on the extraordinarily successful *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, a work that continued to exert great prominence as a cultural artefact through much of the twentieth century, inspiring a number of film and theatrical adaptations, musicals and even a ballet. In 1922 Dennis joined the staff of the Melbourne newspaper *The Herald* as 'staff poet', a role which would occupy the bulk of his creative energies for the rest of his life. His last publication, *The Singing Garden*, was based on Dennis' observations of his garden at 'Arden'. He died of a heart condition brought on by asthma on 22 June 1938.

A Spring Song

THE world 'as got me snouted jist a treat;
Crool Forchin's dirty left 'as smote me soul;
An' all them joys o' life I 'eld so sweet
Is up the pole.
Fer, as the poit sez, me 'eart 'as got
The pip wiv yearnin' fer—I dunno wot.

I'm crook; me name is Mud; I've done me dash;
Me flamin' spirit's got the flamin' 'ump!
I'm longin' to let loose on somethin' rash....
Aw, I'm a chump!
I know it; but this blimed ole Springtime craze
Fair outs me, on these dilly, silly days.

The young green leaves is shootin' on the trees,
The air is like a long, cool swig o' beer,
The bonzer smell o' flow'rs is on the breeze,
An' 'ere's me, 'ere,
Jist moochin' round like some pore, barmy coot,
Of 'ope, an' joy, an' forchin destichoot.

I've lorst me former joy in gettin' shick,
Or 'eadin' browns; I 'aven't got the 'eart
To word a tom; an', square an' all, I'm sick
Of that cheap tart
'Oo chucks 'er carkis at a feller's 'ead
An' mauls 'im...Ar! I wish't that I wus dead!...

Ther's little breezes stirrin' in the leaves,
An' sparrers chirpin' 'igh the 'ole day long;
An' on the air a sad, sweet music breaves
A bonzer song—
A mournful sorter choon thet gits a bloke
Fair in the brisket 'ere, an' makes 'im choke...

What is the matter wiv me?...I dunno.
I got a sorter yearnin' 'ere inside,
A dead-crook sorter thing that won't let go
Or be denied—
A feelin' like I want to do a break,
An' stoush creation for some woman's sake.

The little birds is chirpin' in the nest,
The parks an' gardings is a bosker sight,
Where smilin' tarts walks up an' down, all dressed
In clobber white.
An', as their snowy forms goes steppin' by,

It seems I'm seekin' somethin' on the sly.

Somethin' or someone—I don't rightly know;
But, seems to me, I'm kind er lookin' for
A tart I knoo a 'undred years ago,
Or, maybe, more.
Wot's this I've 'eard them call that thing?...Geewhizz!
Me ideel bit o' skirt! That's wot it is!

Me ideel tart!...An', bli'me, look at me!
Jist take a squiz at this, an' tell me can
Some square an' honist tom take this to be
'Er own true man?
Aw, Gawd! I'd be as true to 'er, I would—
As straight an' stiddy as...Ar, wot's the good?

Me, that 'as done me stretch fer stoushin' Johns,
An' spen's me leisure gittin' on the shick,
An' 'arf me nights down there, in Little Lon.,
Wiv Ginger Mick,
Jist 'eadin' 'em, an' doing in me gilt.
Tough luck! I s'pose it's 'ow a man is built.

It's 'ow Gawd builds a bloke; but don't it 'urt
When 'e gits yearnin's fer this 'igher life,
On these Spring mornin's, watchin' some sweet skirt—
Some fucher wife—
Go sailin' by, an' turnin' on his phiz
The glarssy eye—fer bein' wot 'e is.

I've watched 'em walkin' in the gardings 'ere—
Cliners from orfices an' shops an' such;
The sorter skirts I dursn't come too near,
Or dare to touch.
An, when I see the kind er looks they carst...
Gorstrooth! Wot is the use o' me, I arst?

Wot wus I slung 'ere for? An' wot's the good
Of yearnin' after any ideel tart?...
Ar, if a bloke wus only understood!
'E's got a 'eart:
'E's got a soul inside 'im, poor or rich.
But wot's the use, when 'Eaven's crool'd 'is pitch?

I tells meself some day I'll take a pull
An' look eround fer some good, stiddy job,
An' cut the push fer good an' all; I'm full
Of that crook mob!
An', in some Spring the fucher 'olds in store,
I'll cop me prize an' long in vain no more.

The little winds is stirrin' in the trees,
Where little birds is chantin' lovers' lays;
The music of the sorft an' barmy breeze....
Aw, spare me days!
If this 'ere dilly feelin' doesn't stop
I'll lose me block an' stoush some flamin' cop!

from The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke

When the Sun's Behind the Hill

There's a soft and peaceful feeling
Comes across the farming hand
As the shadows go a-stealing
Slow along the new-turned land.
The lazy curling smoke above the thatch is showing blue,
And the weary old plough horses wander home 'ard two 'n' two,
With their chains a-clinkin', clankin', when their daily toil is through,
And the sun's behind the hill.

Then it's slowly homeward plodding
As the night begins to creep,
And the barley grass is nodding
To the daisies, all asleep,
The crows are flying heavily, and cawing overhead;
The sleepy milking cows are lowing softly in the shed,
And above them, in the rafters, all the fowls have gone to bed,
When the sun's behind the hill.

Then it's "Harry, feed old Roaney!"
And it's "Bill, put up the rail!"
And it's "Tom, turn out the pony!"
"Mary, hurry with that pail!"
And the kiddies run to meet us, and are begging for a ride
On the broad old "Prince" and "Darky" they can hardly sit astride;
And mother, she is bustling with the supper things inside,
When the sun's behind the hill.

Then it's sitting down and yarning
When we've had our bite and sup,
And the mother takes her darning,
While our Mary tidies up.
And Bess tells how the baldy cow got tangled in the wire;
And Katie keeps the baby-boy from tumbling in the fire;
And the baccy smoke goes curling as I suck my soothing briar,
When the sun's behind the hill.

Then we talk about the season,
And of how it's turning out,
And we try to guess the reason
For the long-continued drought.
Oh, a farmer's life ain't roses and his work is never done:
And a job's no sooner over than another is begun.
For he's toiling late and early from the rising of the sun
Till he sinks behind the hill.

But it grows, that peaceful feeling
While I'm sitting smoking there,

And the kiddies all are kneeling
To repeat their ev'ning prayer;
For it seems, somehow, to lighten all the care that must be bore
When the things of life are worrying, and times are troubling sore;
And I pray that God will keep them when my own long-day is o'er,
And the sun's behind the hill.

Dusk

Now is the healing, quiet hour that fills
This gay, green world with peace and grateful rest.
Where lately over opalescent hills
The blood of slain Day reddened all the west,
Now comes at Night's behest,
A glow that over all the forest spills,
As with the gold of promised daffodils.
Of all hours this is best.

It is time for thoughts of holy things,
Of half-forgotten friends and one's own folk.
O'er all, the garden-scented sweetness clings
To mingle with the wood fire's drifting smoke.
A bull-frog's startled croak
Sounds from the gully where the last bird sings
His laggard vesper hymn, with folded wings;
And night spreads forth her cloak.

Keeping their vigil where the great range yearns,
Like rigid sentries stand the wise old gums.
On blundering wings a night-moth wheels and turns
And lumbers on, mingling its drowsy hums
With that far roll of drums,
Where the swift creek goes tumbling amidst the ferns...
Now, as the first star in the zenith burns,
The dear, soft darkness comes.

"Den"

The Herald 11 December 1931, p6

Note:

This poem was originally published in the Herald under the title "In a Forest Garden".

JOHN O'BRIEN

1878 – 1952

Monsignor Patrick Joseph Hartigan (13 October 1878 – 27 December 1952) was an Australian Roman Catholic priest, educator, author and poet.

Hartigan wrote under the pseudonym "John O'Brien." His verse celebrated the lives and mores of the outback pastoral folk he ministered as a peripatetic curate to the southern New South Wales and Riverina towns of Thurgoona, Berrigan and Narrandera, in the first two decades of the 20th century.

The refrain *We'll all be rooned* from his poem *Said Hanrahan* has entered colloquial Australian English as a jocular response to any prediction of dire consequences arising, particularly, from events outside the interlocutor's control.

Said Hanrahan

"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
In accents most forlorn,
Outside the church, ere Mass began,
One frosty Sunday morn.

The congregation stood about,
Coat-collars to the ears,
And talked of stock, and crops, and drought,
As it had done for years.

"It's looking crook," said Daniel Croke;
"Bedad, it's cruke, me lad,
For never since the banks went broke
Has seasons been so bad."

"It's dry, all right," said young O'Neil,
With which astute remark
He squatted down upon his heel
And chewed a piece of bark.

And so around the chorus ran
"It's keepin' dry, no doubt."
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"Before the year is out."

"The crops are done; ye'll have your work
To save one bag of grain;
From here way out to Back-o'-Bourke
They're singin' out for rain.

"They're singin' out for rain," he said,
"And all the tanks are dry."
The congregation scratched its head,
And gazed around the sky.

"There won't be grass, in any case,
Enough to feed an ass;
There's not a blade on Casey's place
As I came down to Mass."

"If rain don't come this month," said Dan,
And cleared his throat to speak -
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"If rain don't come this week."

A heavy silence seemed to steal
On all at this remark;

And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed a piece of bark.

"We want an inch of rain, we do,"
O'Neil observed at last;
But Croke "maintained" we wanted two
To put the danger past.

"If we don't get three inches, man,
Or four to break this drought,
We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"Before the year is out."

In God's good time down came the rain;
And all the afternoon
On iron roof and window-pane
It drummed a homely tune.

And through the night it pattered still,
And lightsome, gladsome elves
On dripping spout and window-sill
Kept talking to themselves.

It pelted, pelted all day long,
A-singing at its work,
Till every heart took up the song
Way out to Back-o'-Bourke.

And every creek a banker ran,
And dams filled o'ertop;
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"If this rain doesn't stop."

And stop it did, in God's good time;
And spring came in to fold
A mantle o'er the hills sublime
Of green and pink and gold.

And days went by on dancing feet,
With harvest-hopes immense,
And laughing eyes beheld the wheat
Nid-nodding o'er the fence.

And, oh, the smiles on every face,
As happy lad and lass
Through grass knee-deep on Casey's place
Went riding down to Mass.

While round the church in clothes genteel
Discoursed the men of mark,
And each man squatted on his heel,

And chewed his piece of bark.

"There'll be bush-fires for sure, me man,
There will, without a doubt;
We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"Before the year is out."

DOROTHEA MACKELLAR

1885 – 1968

Dorothea Mackellar was born in Sydney in 1885 into a well-established, wealthy family, and was educated privately at the University of Sydney. At 19 years old she wrote a poem, 'My Country', the second verse of which is perhaps the best known stanza in Australian poetry. Her family owned substantial properties in the Gunnedah district of New South Wales and it is in this town which claims her as their own, there a statue of her on horseback has been erected.

Dorothea died in 1968.

My Country

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes.
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins,
Strong love of grey-blue distance
Brown streams and soft dim skies
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror -
The wide brown land for me!

A stark white ring-barked forest
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die -
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow

Gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold -
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land -
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand -
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

The Colours of Light

This is not easy to understand
For you that come from a distant land
Where all the colours are low in pitch -
Deep purples, emeralds deep and rich,
Where autumn's flaming and summer's green -
Here is a beauty you have not seen.

All is pitched in a higher key,
Lilac, topaz, and ivory,
Palest jade-green and pale clear blue
Like aquamarines that the sun shines through,
Golds and silvers, we have at will -
Silver and gold on each plain and hill,
Silver-green of the myall leaves,
Tawny gold of the garnered sheaves,
Silver rivers that silent slide,
Golden sands by the water-side,

Golden wattle, and golden broom,
Silver stars of the rosewood bloom;
Amber sunshine, and smoke-blue shade:
Opal colours that glow and fade;
On the gold of the upland grass
Blue cloud-shadows that swiftly pass;
Wood-smoke blown in an azure mist;
Hills of tenuous amethyst. . .

Oft the colours are pitched so high
The deepest note is the cobalt sky;
We have to wait till the sunset comes
For shades that feel like the beat of drums -
Or like organ notes in their rise and fall -
Purple and orange and cardinal,
Or the peacock-green that turns soft and slow
To peacock-blue as the great stars show . . .

Sugar-gum boles flushed to peach-blow pink;
Blue-gums, tall at the clearing's brink;
Ivory pillars, their smooth fine slope
Dappled with delicate heliotrope;
Grey of the twisted mulga-roots;
Golden-bronze of the budding shoots;
Tints of the lichens that cling and spread,
Nile-green, primrose, and palest red . . .

Sheen of the bronze-wing; blue of the crane;
Fawn and pearl of the lyrebird's train;

Cream of the plover; grey of the dove -
These are the hues of the land I love.

LESBIA HARFORD

1891 – 1927

Lesbia Harford was born Lesbia Venner Keogh at Brighton, Melbourne, on 9 April 1891. The daughter of Edmund Keogh, a financial agent, and his wife Helen (née Moore), she was born with a congenital heart defect that affected her health throughout her short life. The family's comfortable existence was shattered when Edmund Keogh became bankrupt about 1900. According to the later account of Lesbia's younger brother Esmond, their father then took to drink and deserted the family, leaving their mother with four young children. Lesbia was educated at convent schools in Melbourne and Ballarat, but gave up her Catholic faith at a young age, and in her teenage years took part in meetings of the socialist Unitarian minister Frederick Sinclair's Free Religious Fellowship.

In 1912 she began a law degree at the University of Melbourne, supporting herself through her studies by tutoring and teaching art, and graduated in 1916. While a student, she became heavily involved in radical politics, forming important, long-lasting relationships with other young socialist activists and intellectuals, including Guido Barrachi and Katie Lush. After graduating Harford went to work in a clothing factory, where she became involved in unionism and joined the Industrial Workers of the World organization. She moved briefly to Sydney, where in 1920 she married Patrick Harford, an artist and fellow I.W.W. member, before the couple returned to Melbourne. From 1921 to 1924, she worked on a novel, but did not publish it. She attempted to complete her law qualifications and in 1926 became an articled clerk to a Melbourne barrister but, suffering from tuberculosis in addition to her heart condition, her health deteriorated and she died on 5 July 1927.

Little of Harford's poetry was published during her lifetime; she claimed late in life that she was 'in no hurry to be read', and preserved her work in hand-written exercise books. Her poetry is mainly known through the posthumous collections edited by Nettie Palmer (1941) and by Marjorie Pizer and Drusilla Modjeska (1985). Her novel *The Invaluable Mystery* was eventually published in 1987. Much of Harford's early work was written in a straightforward lyric style, though with some modernist elements, and was often passionate and intense love poetry. Her interest in social justice issues became a strong theme in her later work, and some of her later poems resemble protest songs, intended to be sung rather than read, and were written in a simple style for a wide audience.

[This year I have seen autumn with new eyes]

This year I have seen autumn with new eyes,
Glimpsed hitherto undreamt of mysteries
In the slow ripening of the town-bred trees;
Horse-chestnut lifting wide hands to the skies;
And silver beech turned gold now winter's near;
And elm, whose leaves like little suns appear
Scattering light — all, all have made me wise
And writ me lectures in earth's loveliness,
Whether they laugh through the grey morning mist,
Or by the loving sun at noon are kissed
Or seek at night the high-swung lamp's caress.
Does autumn such a novel splendour wear
Simply because my love has yellow hair?

May, 1912

Machinists Talking

I sit at my machine,
Hour long beside me Vera, aged nineteen,
Babbles her sweet and innocent tale of sex.

Her boy, she hopes, will prove
Unlike his father in the act of love,
Twelve children are too many for her taste.

She looks sidelong, blue-eyed
And tells a girlish story of a bride
With the sweet licence of Arabian queens.

Her child, she says, saw light
Minute for minute, nine months from the night
The mother first lay in her lover's arms.

She says a friend of hers
Is a man's mistress who gives jewels and furs
But will not have her soft limbs cased in stays.

I open my small store
And tell of a young, delicate girl, a whore
Stole from her mother many months ago.

Fate made the woman seem
To have a tiger's loveliness, to gleam
Strong and fantastic as a beast of prey.

I sit at my machine,
Hour long beside me Vera, aged nineteen,
Babbles her sweet and innocent tale of sex.

Revolution

She is not of the fireside,
My lovely love;
Nor books, nor even a cradle,
She bends above.

No, she is bent with lashes,
Her flesh is torn.
From blackness into blackness
She walks forlorn.

But factories and prisons
Are far more fair
Than home or palace gardens
If she is there.

12.2.18

[I hate work so]

I hate work so
That I have found a way
Of making one small task outlast the day.

I will not leave
The garden and the sun,
In spite of all the work that should be done.

So when I go
To really make my bed
I've made it ten times over in my head.

Then as for meals!
I think I'd rather be
A nervous wreck than make a cup of tea.

The fire's so low
It isn't any good—
While I sit planning to put on some wood.

One thing is sure,
I pity other drones,
God having made me such a lazy-bones.

10.6.25

[What were the good of stars if none looked on them]

What were the good of stars if none looked on them
But mariners, astronomers and such!
The sun and moon and stars were made for lovers.
I know that much.

13.1.27

In the Public Library

Standing on tiptoe, head back, eyes and arm
Upraised, Kate groped to reach the higher shelf.
Her sleeve slid up like darkness in alarm
At gleam of dawn. Impatient with herself
For lack of inches, careless of her charm,
She strained to grasp a volume; then she turned
Back to her chair, an unforgetful Eve
Still snatching at the fruit for which she yearned
In Eden. She read idly to relieve
The forehead where her daylong studies burned,
Tales of an uncrowned queen who fed her child
On poisons, till death lurked, in act to spring,
Between the girl's breasts; who with soft mouth smiled
With soft eyes tempted the usurping King
Then dealt him death in kisses. Kate had piled
Her books three deep before her and across
This barricade she watched an old man nod
Over a dirty paper, until loss
Of life seemed better than possession. Shod
With kisses death might skid like thistle floss
Down windy slides, might prove at heart as gay
As Cinderella in glass slippers.
Life goes awkwardly so sandalled. Had decay
Been the girl's gift in that Miltonic strife
She would have rivalled God, Kate thought. A ray
Of sunshine carrying gilded flecks of dust
And minutes bright with fancies, touched her hair
To powder it with gold and silver, just
As if being now admitted she should wear
The scholar's wig, colleague of those whose lust
For beauty hidden in an outworn tongue
Had made it possible for her to read
Tales that were fathered in Arabia, sung
By trouvères and forgotten with their creed
Of love and magic. Beams that strayed among
Kate's fingers lit a rosy lantern there
To glow in twilight. Suddenly afraid
She seemed to see her beauty in a flare
Of light from hell. A throng of devils swayed
Before her, devils that had learned to wear
The shape of scholar, poet, libertine.
They smiled, frowned, beckoned, swearing to estrange
Kate from reflection that her soul had been
Slain by her woman's body or would change
From contact with it to a thing unclean.
Woman was made to worship man, they preached,
Not God, to serve earth's purpose, not to roam

The heavens of thought ... A factory whistle screeched,
Someone turned up the lights. On her way home
Kate wondered in what mode were angels breeched.

Xmas, 1912

Closing Time Public Library

At ten o'clock its great gong sounds the dread
Prelude to splendour. I push back my chair,
And all the people leave their books. We flock,
Still acquiescent, down the marble stair
Into the dark where we can't read. And thought
Swoops down insatiate through the starry air.

KENNETH SLESSOR

1901–1971

Slessor, known as one of the first truly Australian poets, began publishing his poetry in the 1920's in *Vision*. These early poems illustrated a stylistic movement from Australian bush poetry to a Nietzschean unrestrained joy in beauty and life. The early poems revealed an antimodernist, anti-intellectual paganism.

In his later works, Slessor applied technical innovations to Australian themes. He utilized unconventional rhyme, lyrical experiments, rich imagery, and dramatic techniques. His poetry vented verbal energy mollified by the use of irony. Though melancholy and disillusion were characteristic of Slessor's poetry, individualism and a zest for life were also prominent features. Slessor's favorite themes included time, the sea, and reflections on memory; his message was one of romantic renunciation.

Kenneth Slessor was born in Orange, New South Wales, in 1901. He published his first poetry in the *Bulletin* magazine while still at school. He worked on the *Sydney Sun* newspaper from 1920 to 1925, and for a while on the *Melbourne Punch* and *Melbourne Herald*. He returned to Sydney in 1927 to work on *Smith's Weekly*, where he stayed until 1939.

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In 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War, Slessor was appointed as an official war correspondent, and spent time with Australian troops in England, Greece, the Middle-East and New Guinea.

At the end of the war he returned to the *Sydney Sun* as a leader-writer and literary editor until 1957. He then worked for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*. During this period (from 1956 - 1961) he was also editor of the literary magazine *Southerly*.

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Winter Dawn

At five I wake, rise, rub on the smoking pane
A port to see—water breathing in the air,
Boughs broken. The sun comes up in a golden stain,
Floats like a glassy sea-fruit. There is mist everywhere,
White and humid, and the Harbour is like plated stone,
Dull flakes of ice. One light drips out alone,
One bead of winter-red, smouldering in the steam,
Quietly over the roof-tops—another window
Touched with a crystal fire in the sun's gullies,
One lonely star of the morning, where no stars gleam.

Far away on the rim of this great misty cup,
The sun gilds the dead suburbs as he rises up,
Diamonds the wind-cocks, makes glitter the crusted spikes
On moss-drowned gables. Now the tiles drip scarlet-wet,
Swim like birds' paving-stones, and sunlight strikes
Their watery mirrors with a moister rivulet,
Acid and cold. Here lie those mummied Kings,
Men sleeping in houses, embalmed in stony coffins,
Till the Last Trumpet calls their galleries up,
And the suburbs rise with distant murmurings.

O buried dolls, O men sleeping invisible there,
I stare above your mounds of stone, lean down,
Marooned and lonely in this bitter air,
And in one moment deny your frozen town,
Renounce your bodies—earth falls in clouds away,
Stones lose their meaning, substance is lost in clay,
Roofs fade, and that small smoking forgotten heap,
The city, dissolves to a shell of bricks and paper,
Empty, without purpose, a thing not comprehended,
A broken tomb, where ghosts unknown sleep.

And the least crystal weed, shaken with frost,
The furred herbs of silver, the daisies round-eyed and tart,
Painted in antic china, the smallest night-flower tossed
Like a bright penny on the lawn, stirs more my heart,
Strikes deeper this morning air, than mortal towers
Dried to a common blindness, fainter than flowers,
Fordone, extinguished, as the vapours break,
And dead in the dawn. O Sun that kills with life,
And brings to breath all silent things—O Dawn,
Waken me with old earth, keep me awake!

North Country

North Country, filled with gesturing wood,
With trees that fence, like archers' volleys,
The flanks of hidden valleys
Where nothing's left to hide

But verticals and perpendiculars,
Like rain gone wooden, fixed in falling,
Or fingers blindly feeling
For what nobody cares;

Or trunks of pewter, bangled by greedy death,
Stuck with black staghorns, quietly sucking,
And trees whose boughs go seeking,
And tress like broken teeth

With smoky antlers broken in the sky;
Or trunks that lie grotesquely rigid,
Like bodies blank and wretched
After a fool's battue,

As if they've secret ways of dying here
And secret places for their anguish
When boughs at last relinquish
Their clench of blowing air

But this gaunt country, filled with mills and saws,
With butter-works and railway-stations
And public institutions,
And scornful rumps of cows,

North Country, filled with gesturing wood—
Timber's the end it gives to branches,
Cut off in cubic inches,
Dripping red with blood.

South Country

After the whey-faced anonymity
Of river-gums and scribbly-gums and bush,
After the rubbing and the hit of brush,
You come to the South Country

As if the argument of trees were done,
The doubts and quarrelling, the plots and pains,
All ended by these clear and gliding planes
Like an abrupt solution.

And over the flat earth of empty farms
The monstrous continent of air floats back
Coloured with rotting sunlight and the black,
Bruised flesh of thunderstorms:

Air arched, enormous, pounding the bony ridge,
Ditches and hutches, with a drench of light,
So huge, from such infinities of height,
You walk on the sky's beach

While even the dwindled hills are small and bare,
As if, rebellious, buried, pitiful,
Something below pushed up a knob of skull,
Feeling its way to air.

Five Visions of Captain Cook

I

Cook was a captain of the Admiralty
When sea-captains had the evil eye,
Or should have, what with beating krakens off
And casting nativities of ships;
Cook was a captain of the powder-days
When captains, you might have said, if you had been
Fixed by their glittering stare, half-down the side,
Or gaping at them up companionways,
Were more like warlocks than a humble man—
And men were humble then who gazed at them,
Poor horn-eyed sailors, bullied by devils' fists
Of wind or water, or the want of both,
Childlike and trusting, filled with eager trust—
Cook was a captain of the sailing days
When sea-captains were kings like this,
Not cold executives of company-rules
Cracking their boilers for a dividend
Or bidding their engineers go wink
At bells and telegraphs, so plates would hold
Another pound. Those captains drove their ships
By their own blood, no laws of schoolbook steam,
Till yards were sprung, and masts went overboard—
Daemons in periwigs, doling magic out,
Who read fair alphabets in stars
Where humbler men found but a mess of sparks,
Who steered their crews by mysteries
And strange, half-dreadful sortilege with books,
Used medicines that only gods could know
The sense of, but sailors drank
In simple faith. That was the captain
Cook was when he came to the Coral Sea
And chose a passage into the dark.

How many mariners had made that choice
Paused on the brink of mystery! 'Choose now!'
The winds roared, blowing home, blowing home,
Over the Coral Sea. 'Choose now!' the trades
Cried once to Tasman, throwing him for choice
Their teeth or shoulders, and the Dutchman chose
The wind's way, turning north. 'Choose, Bougainville!'
The wind cried once, and Bougainville had heard
The voice of God, calling him prudently
Out of the dead lee shore, and chose the north,
The wind's way. So, too, Cook made choice,
Over the brink, into the devil's mouth,
With four months' food, and sailors wild with dreams

Of English beer, the smoking barns of home.
So Cook made choice, so Cook sailed westabout,
So men write poems in Australia.

II

Flowers turned to stone! Not all the botany
Of Joseph Banks, hung pensive in a porthole,
Could find the Latin for this loveliness,
Could put the Barrier Reef in a glass box
Tagged by the horrid Gorgon squint
Of horticulture. Stone turned to flowers
It seemed—you'd snap a crystal twig,
One petal even of the water-garden,
And have it dying like a cherry-bough.
They'd sailed all day outside a coral hedge,
And half the night. Cook sailed at night,
Let there be reefs a fathom from the keel
And empty charts. The sailors didn't ask,
Nor Joseph Banks. Who cared? It was the spell
Of Cook that lulled them, bade them turn below,
Kick off their sea-boots, puff themselves to sleep,
Though there were more shoals outside
Than teeth in a shark's head. Cook snored loudest himself.

One day, a morning of light airs and calms,
They slid towards a reef that would have knifed
Their boards to mash, and murdered every man.
So close it sucked them, one wave shook their keel,
The next blew past the coral. Three officers,
In gilt and buttons, languidly on deck
Pointed their sextants at the sun. One yawned,
One held a pencil, one put eye to lens:
Three very peaceful English mariners
Taking their sights for longitude.
I've never heard
Of sailors aching for the longitude
Of shipwrecks before or since. It was the spell
Of Cook did this, the phylacteries of Cook.
Men who ride broomsticks with a mesmerist
Mock the typhoon. So, too, it was with Cook.

III

Two chronometers the captain had,
One by Arnold that ran like mad,
One by Kendal in a walnut case,
Poor devoted creature with a hangdog face.

Arnold always hurried with a crazed click-click
Dancing over Greenwich like a lunatic,

Kendal panted faithfully his watch-dog beat,
Climbing out of Yesterday with sticky little feet.

Arnold choked with appetite to wolf up time,
Madly round the numerals his hands would climb,
His cogs rushed over and his wheels ran miles,
Dragging Captain Cook to the Sandwich Isles.

But Kendal dawdled in the tombstoned past,
With a sentimental prejudice to going fast,
And he thought very often of a haberdasher's door
And a yellow-haired boy who would knock no more.

All through the night-time, clock talked to clock,
In the captain's cabin, tock-tock-tock,
One ticked fast and one ticked slow,
And Time went over them a hundred years ago.

IV

Sometimes the god would fold his wings
And, stone of Caesars turned to flesh,
Talk of the most important things
That serious-minded midshipmen could wish,

Of plantains, and the lack of rum
Or spearing sea-cows—things like this
That hungry schoolboys, five days dumb,
In jolly-boats are wonted to discuss.

What midshipman would pause to mourn
The sun that beat about his ears,
Or curse the tide, if he could horn
His fists by tugging on those lumbering oars?

Let rum-tanned mariners prefer
To hug the weather-side of yards,
'Cats to catch mice' before they purr,
Those were the captain's enigmatic words.

Here, in this jolly-boat they graced,
Were food and freedom, wind and storm,
While, fowling-piece across his waist,
Cook mapped the coast, with one eye cocked for game.

V

After the candles had gone out, and those
Who listened had gone out, and a last wave
Of chimney-haloes caked their smoky rings
Like fish-scales on the ceiling, a Yellow Sea

Of swimming circles, the old man,
Old Captain-in-the-Corner, drank his rum
With friendly gestures to four chairs. They stood
Empty, still warm from haunches, with rubbed nails
And leather glazed, like aged serving-men
Feeding a king's delight, the sticky, drugged
Sweet agony of habitual anecdotes.
But these, his chairs, could bear an old man's tongue,
Sleep when he slept, be flattering when he woke,
And wink to hear the same eternal name
From lips new-dipped in rum.

'Then Captain Cook,
I heard him, told them they could go
If so they chose, but he would get them back,
Dead or alive, he'd have them,'
The old man screeched, half-thinking to hear 'Cook!
Cook again! Cook! It's other cooks he'll need,
Cooks who can bake a dinner out of pence,
That's what he lives on, talks on, half-a-crown
A day, and sits there full of Cook.
Who'd do your cooking now, I'd like to ask,
If someone didn't grind her bones away?
But that's the truth, six children and half-a-crown
A day, and a man gone daft with Cook.'

That was his wife,
Elizabeth, a noble wife but brisk,
Who lived in a present full of kitchen-fumes
And had no past. He had not seen her
For seven years, being blind, and that of course
Was why he'd had to strike a deal with chairs,
Not knowing when those who chafed them had gone to sleep
Or stolen away. Darkness and empty chairs,
This was the port that Alexander Home
Had come to with his useless cutlass-wounds
And tales of Cook, and half-a-crown a day—
This was the creek he'd run his timbers to,
Where grateful countrymen repaid his wounds
At half-a-crown a day. Too good, too good,
This eloquent offering of birdcages
To gulls, and Greenwich Hospital to Cook,
Britannia's mission to the sea-fowl.

It was not blindness picked his flesh away,
Nor want of sight made penny-blank the eyes
Of Captain Home, but that he lived like this
In one place, and gazed elsewhere. His body moved
In Scotland, but his eyes were dazzle-full
Of skies and water farther round the world—
Air soaked with blue, so thick it dripped like snow

On spice-tree boughs, and water diamond-green,
Beaches wind-glittering with crumbs of gilt,
And birds more scarlet than a duchy's seal
That had come whistling long ago, and far
Away. His body had gone back,
Here it sat drinking rum in Berwickshire,
But not his eyes—they were left floating there
Half-round the earth, blinking at beaches milked
By suck-mouth tides, foaming with ropes of bubbles
And huge half-moons of surf. Thus it had been
When Cook was carried on a sailor's back,
Vengeance in a cocked hat, to claim his price,
A prince in barter for a longboat.
And then the trumpery springs of fate—a stone,
A musket-shot, a round of gunpowder,
And puzzled animals, killing they knew not what
Or why, but killing . . . the surge of goatish flanks
Armoured in feathers, like cruel birds:
Wild, childish faces, killing; a moment seen,
Marines with crimson coats and puffs of smoke
Toppling face-down; and a knife of English iron,
Forged aboard ship, that had been changed for pigs,
Given back to Cook between the shoulder-blades.
There he had dropped, and the old floundering sea,
The old, fumbling, witless lover-enemy,
Had taken his breath, last office of salt water.

Cook died. The body of Alexander Home
Flowed round the world and back again, with eyes
Marooned already, and came to English coasts,
The vague ancestral darknesses of home,
Seeing them faintly through a glass of gold,
Dim fog-shapes, ghosted like the ribs of trees
Against his blazing waters and blue air.
But soon they faded, and there was nothing left,
Only the sugar-cane and the wild granaries
Of sand, and palm-trees and the flying blood
Of cardinal-birds; and putting out one hand
Tremulously in the direction of the beach,
He felt a chair in Scotland. And sat down.

Five Bells

*Time that is moved by little fidget wheels
Is not my time, the flood that does not flow.
Between the double and the single bell
Of a ship's hour; between a round of bells
From the dark warship riding there below,
I have lived many lives, and this one life
Of Joe, long dead, who lives between five bells.*

Deep and dissolving verticals of light
Ferry the falls of moonshine down. Five bells
Coldly rung out in a machine's voice. Night and water
Pour to one rip of darkness, the Harbour floats
In the air, the Cross hangs upside-down in water.

Why do I think of you, dead man, why thief
These profitless lodgings from the flukes of thought
Anchored in Time? You have gone from earth,
Gone even from the meaning of a name;
Yet something's there, yet something forms its lips
And hits and cries against the ports of space,
Beating their sides to make its fury heard.

Are you shouting at me, dead man, squeezing your face
In agonies of speech on speechless panes?
Cry louder, beat the windows, bawl your name!

But I hear nothing, nothing...only bells,
Five bells, the bumpkin calculus of Time.
Your echoes die, your voice is dowsed by Life,
There's not a mouth can fly the pygmy strait —
Nothing except the memory of some bones
Long shoved away, and sucked away, in mud;
And unimportant things you might have done,
Or once I thought you did; but you forgot,
And all have now forgotten — looks and words
And slops of beer; your coat with buttons off,
Your gaunt chin and pricked eye, and raging tales
Of Irish kings and English perfidy,
And dirtier perfidy of publicans
Groaning to God from Darlington.
Five bells.

Then I saw the road, I heard the thunder
Tumble, and felt the talons of the rain
The night we came to Moorebank in slab-dark,
So dark you bore no body, had no face,
But a sheer voice that rattled out of air

(As now you'd cry if I could break the glass),
A voice that spoke beside me in the bush,
Loud for a breath or bitten off by wind,
Of Milton, melons, and the Rights of Man,
And blowing flutes, and how Tahitian girls
Are brown and angry-tongued, and Sydney girls
Are white and angry-tongued, or so you'd found.
But all I heard was words that didn't join
So Milton became melons, melons girls,
And fifty mouths, it seemed, were out that night,
And in each tree an Ear was bending down,
Or something that had just run, gone behind the grass,
When blank and bone-white, like a maniac's thought,
The naphtha-flash of lightning slit the sky,
Knifing the dark with deathly photographs.
There's not so many with so poor a purse
Or fierce a need, must fare by night like that,
Five miles in darkness on a country track,
But when you do, that's what you think.
Five bells.

In Melbourne, your appetite had gone,
Your angers too; they had been leeches away
By the soft archery of summer rains
And the sponge-paws of wetness, the slow damp
That stuck the leaves of living, snailed the mind,
And showed your bones, that had been sharp with rage,
The sodden ecstasies of rectitude.
I thought of what you'd written in faint ink,
Your journal with the sawn-off lock, that stayed behind
With other things you left, all without use,
All without meaning now, except a sign
That someone had been living who now was dead:
"At Labassa. Room 6 x 8
On top of the tower; because of this, very dark
And cold in winter. Everything has been stowed
Into this room — 500 books all shapes
And colours, dealt across the floor
And over sills and on the laps of chairs;
Guns, photos of many different things
And different curios that I obtained..."

In Sydney, by the spent aquarium-flare
Of penny gaslight on pink wallpaper,
We argued about blowing up the world,
But you were living backward, so each night
You crept a moment closer to the breast,
And they were living, all of them, those frames
And shapes of flesh that had perplexed your youth,
And most your father, the old man gone blind,
With fingers always round a fiddle's neck,

That graveyard mason whose fair monuments
And tablets cut with dreams of piety
Rest on the bosoms of a thousand men
Staked bone by bone, in quiet astonishment
At cargoes they had never thought to bear,
These funeral-cakes of sweet and sculptured stone.

Where have you gone? The tide is over you,
The turn of midnight water's over you,
As Time is over you, and mystery,
And memory, the flood that does not flow.
You have no suburb, like those easier dead
In private berths of dissolution laid —
The tide goes over, the waves ride over you
And let their shadows down like shining hair,
But they are Water; and the sea-pinks bend
Like lilies in your teeth, but they are Weed;
And you are only part of an Idea.
I felt the wet push its black thumb-balls in,
The night you died, I felt your eardrums crack,
And the short agony, the longer dream,
The Nothing that was neither long nor short;
But I was bound, and could not go that way,
But I was blind, and could not feel your hand.
If I could find an answer, could only find
Your meaning, or could say why you were here
Who now are gone, what purpose gave you breath
Or seized it back, might I not hear your voice?

I looked out my window in the dark
At waves with diamond quills and combs of light
That arched their mackerel-backs and smacked the sand
In the moon's drench, that straight enormous glaze,
And ships far off asleep, and Harbour-buoys
Tossing their fireballs wearily each to each,
And tried to hear your voice, but all I heard
Was a boat's whistle, and the scraping squeal
Of seabirds' voices far away, and bells,
Five bells. Five bells coldly ringing out.
Five bells.

Country Towns

Country towns with your willows and squares,
And farmers bouncing on barrel mares
To public-houses of yellow wood
With "1860" over their doors,
And that mysterious race of Hogans
Which always keeps General Stores . . .

At the School of Arts, a broadsheet lies
Sprayed with the sarcasm of flies:
"The Great Golightly Family" -
Of Entertainers Here To-night"-
Dated a year and a half ago,
But let there, less from carelessness
Than from a wish to seem polite.

Verandas baked with musky sleep,
Mulberry faces dozing deep,
And dogs that lick the sunlight up
Like paste of gold--or, roused in vain
By far, mysterious buggy-wheels,
Lower their ears, and drowse again . . .

Country towns with your schooner bees,
And locusts burnt in the pepper-trees,
Drown me with syrups, arch your boughs,
Find me a bench and let me snore,
Till, charged with ale and unconcern,
I'll think it's noon at half-past four!

Talbingo

‘Talbingo River’—as one says of bones:
‘Captain’ or ‘Commodore’ that smelt gunpowder
In old engagements no one quite believes
Or understands. Talbingo had its blood
As they did, ran with waters huge and clear
Lopping down mountains,
Turning crags to banks.

Now it’s a sort of aching valley,
Basalt shaggy with scales,
A funnel of tobacco-coloured clay,
Smoulders of puffed earth
And pebbles and shell-bodied flies
And water thickening to stone in pocks.

That’s what we’re like out here,
Beds of dried-up passions.

To the Poetry of Hugh McCrae

Uncles who burst on childhood, from the East,
Blown from air, like bearded ghosts arriving,
And are, indeed, a kind of guessed-at ghost
Through mumbled names at dinner-tables moving,

Bearers of parrots, bonfires of blazing stones,
Their pockets fat with riches out of reason,
Meerschaum and sharks'-teeth, ropes of China coins,
And weeds and seeds and berries blowzed with poison—

So, from the baleful Kimberleys of thought,
From the mad continent of dreams, you wander,
Spending your trophies at our bloodless feet,
Mocking our fortunes with more desperate plunder;

So with your boomerangs of rhyme you come,
With blossoms wrenched from sweet and deadly branches,
And we, pale Crusoes in the moment's tomb,
Watch, turn aside, and touch again those riches,

Nor ask what beaches of the mind you trod,
What skies endured, and unimagined rivers,
Or whiteness trenched by what mysterious tide,
And aching silence of the Never-Nevers;

Watch, turn aside, and touch with easy faith
Your chest of miracles, but counting nothing,
Or dumbly, that you stole them out of death,
Out of death's pyramids, to prove us breathing.

We breathe, who beat the sides of emptiness,
We live, who die by statute in steel hearses,
We dance, whose only posture gives us grace
To squeeze the greasy udders of our purses—

(Look in this harsher glass, and I will show you
The daylight after the darkness, and the morning
After the midnight, and after the night the day
After the year after, terribly returning).

We live by these, your masks and images,
We breathe in this, your quick and borrowed body;
But you take passage on the ruffian seas,
And you are vanished in the dark already.

Advice to Psychologists

YOU spies that pierce the mind with trenches,
Feasting your eyes through private panes,
Who, not content with Heavenly stench,
Insist on taking up the drains,
For you I've only two suggestions,
Who prowl with torches in this Bog—
Small good you'll get from asking questions;
Walk on your nostrils, like a dog.

Out of Time

I

I saw Time flowing like a hundred yachts
That fly behind the daylight, foxed with air;
Or piercing, like the quince-bright, bitter slats
Of sun gone thrusting under Harbour's hair.
So Time, the wave, enfolds me in its bed,
Or Time, the bony knife, it runs me through.
"Skulker, take heart," I thought my own heart said.
"The flood, the blade go by - Time flows, not you!"

Vilely, continuously, stupidly,
Time takes me, drills me, drives through bone and vein,
So water bends the seaweeds in the sea,
The tide goes over, but the weeds remain.

Time, you must cry farewell, take up the track,
And leave this lovely moment at your back!

II

Time leaves the lovely moment at his back,
Eager to quench and ripen, kiss or kill;
To-morrow begs him, breathless for his lack,
Or beauty dead entreats him to be still.
His fate pursues him; he must open doors,
Or close them, for that pale and faceless host
Without a flag, whose agony implores
Birth to be flesh, or funeral, to be ghost.

Out of all reckoning, out of dark and light,
Over the edges of dead Nows and Heres,
Blindly and softly, as a mistress might,
He keeps appointments with a million years.

I and the moment laugh, and let him go,
Leaning against his golden undertow.

III

Leaning against the golden undertow,
Backward, I saw the birds begin to climb
with bodies hailstone-clear, and shadows flow,
Fixed in a sweet meniscus, out of Time,
Out of the torrent, like the fainter land
Lensed in a bubble's ghostly camera,
The lighted beach, the sharp and china sand
Glitters and waters and peninsula -

The moment's world it was; and I was part,

Fleshless and ageless, changeless and made free.
"Fool, would you leave this country?" cried my heart,
But I was taken by the suck of sea.

The gulls go down, the body dies and rots,
And Time flows past them like a hundred yachts.

Taoist

THOSE friends of Lao-Tzu, those wise old men
Dozing all day in lemon-silken robes,
With tomes of beaten jade spread knee to knee,
And pipe-stem, shining cold with silver, poised
In steaming play, and still a finger free
To dog the path of some forgotten pen;
Almost their bee-sweet ancient words incline
My mind to those old pagan ways, beloved
By mandarins and mages, now but dust
In drowsy pyramids. What creed is this,
Save that which those philosophers discussed
In gold pavilions, over musky wine?
"Repenting always of forgotten wrongs
Will never bring thy heart to rest, for thought
Repairs no whit of evil; rather cast
Thy meditations in that utter void
To which all human deeds resolve at last"
So runs the burden of their thousand songs.
Here, in this dark Star-Chamber of the soul,
You stand arraigned, O slayer of my heart . . .
But I am tired of hoarding up the grist
Of anger, and remember Lao-Tzu.
Revenge is empty to the Taoist,
And tears of penitence a futile toll!

Fixed Ideas

Ranks of electroplated cubes, dwindling to glitters,
Like the other pasture, the trigonometry of marble,
Death's candy-bed. Stone caked on stone,
Dry pyramids and racks of iron balls.
Life is observed, a precipitate of pellets,
Or grammarians freeze it into spar,
Their rhomboids, as for instance, the finest crystal
Fixing a snowfall under glass. Gods are laid out
In alabaster, with horny cartilage
And zinc ribs; or systems of ecstasy
Baked into bricks. There is a gallery of sculpture,
Bleached bones of heroes, Gorgon masks of bushrangers;
But the quarries are of more use than this,
Filled with the rolling of huge granite dice,
Ideas and judgments: vivisection, the Baptist Church,
Good men and bad men, polygamy, birth-control . . .

Frail tinkling rush
Water-hair streaming
Prickles and glitters
Cloudy with bristles
River of thought
Swimming the pebbles—
Undo, loosen your bubbles!

Sensuality

FEELING hunger and cold, feeling
Food, feeling fire, feeling
Pity and pain, tasting
Time in a kiss, tasting
Anger and tears, touching
Eyelids with lips, touching
Plague, touching flesh, knowing
Blood in the mouth, knowing
Laughter like flame, holding
Pickaxe and pen, holding
Death in the hand, hearing
Boilers and bells, hearing
Birds, hearing hail, smelling
Cedar and sweat, smelling
Petrol and sea, feeling
Hunger and cold, feeling
Food, feeling fire. . . .
Feeling.

New Magic

At last I know—it's on old ivory jars,
Glassed with old miniatures and garnered once with musk.
I've seen those eyes like smouldering April stars
As carp might see them behind their bubbled skies
In pale green fishponds—they're as green your eyes,
As lakes themselves, changed to green stone at dusk.

At last I know—it's paned in a crystal hoop
On powder-boxes from some dead Italian girl,
I've seen such eyes grow suddenly dark, and droop
Their small, pure lids, as if I'd pried too far
In finding you snared there on that ivory jar
By crusted motes of rose and smoky-pearl.

A Sunset

THE old Quarry, Sun, with bleeding scales,
Flaps up the gullies, wets their crystal pebbles,
Floating with waters of gold; darkness exhales
Brutishly in the valley; smoke rises in bubbles;
Suddenly we stop at the meeting of two trails.

"Do you remember?"

"But now everything is changed—

Trees ringed with death, the creek with its bells clanking
Dried like white bone." Even our voices are estranged.
Darkness chokes the river; so nearly what I am thinking
It echoes, the whole thing might have been arranged!

Beach Burial

Softly and humbly to the Gulf of Arabs
The convoys of dead sailors come;
At night they sway and wander in the waters far under,
But morning rolls them in the foam.

Between the sob and clubbing of the gunfire
Someone, it seems, has time for this,
To pluck them from the shallows and bury them in burrows
And tread the sand upon their nakedness;

And each cross, the driven stake of tidewood,
Bears the last signature of men,
Written with such perplexity, with such bewildered pity,
The words choke as they begin -

'Unknown seaman' - the ghostly pencil
Wavers and fades, the purple drips,
The breath of wet season has washed their inscriptions
As blue as drowned men's lips,

Dead seamen, gone in search of the same landfall,
Whether as enemies they fought,
Or fought with us, or neither; the sand joins them together,
Enlisted on the other front.

El Alamein
1942

In A/C with Ghosts

You can shuffle and scuffle and scold,
You can rattle the knockers and knobs,
Or batter the doorsteps with buckets of gold
Till the Deputy-Governor sobs.
You can sneak up a suitable plank
In a frantic endeavor to see—
But what do they do in the Commonwealth Bank
When the Big Door bangs at Three?

Listen in the cellars, listen in the vaults,
Can't you hear the tellers turning somersaults?
Can't you hear the spectres of inspectors and directors
Dancing with the phantoms in a Dead Man's Waltz?
Some are ghosts of nabobs, poverty and stray bobs,
Midas and his mistress, Mammon and his wife;
Other ones are sentries, guarding double entries,
Long-forgotten, double-dealing, troubled double-life.
Down among the pass-books, money lent and spent,
Down among the forests of the Four Per Cent.,
Where the ledgers meet and moulder, and the overdrafts grow older,
And the phantoms shrug a shoulder when you ask 'em for the rent.

They are bogies of Grandfather's cheques,
They are spectres of buried accounts,
They are crinoline sweethearts with pearls on their necks,
Demanding enormous amounts.
They are payment for suppers and flowers,
For diamonds to banish a tear,
For sweet, pretty ladies in opulent hours . . .
And tombstones . . . and bailiffs . . . and beer . . .

Down in the bowels of the bank, the ledgers lie rank upon rank,
The debts of the ages come out of their pages,
The bones of old loans creak and clank—
Oh, if you could peep through the door
To day at a Quarter Past Four,
You'd find all the ghosts at their usual posts,
And you wouldn't sign cheques any more!

City Nightfall

SMOKE upon smoke; over the stone lips
Of chimneys bleeding, a darker fume descends.
Night, the old nun, in voiceless pity bends
To kiss corruption, so fabulous her pity.
All drowns in night. Even the lazar drowns
In earth at last, and rises up afresh,
Married to dust with an Infanta's flesh—
So night, like earth, receives this poisoned city,
Charging its air with beauty, coasting its lanterns
With mains of darkness, till the leprous clay
Dissolves, and pavements drift away,
And there is only the quiet noise of planets feeding.
And those who chafe here, limed on the iron twigs,
No greater seem than sparrows, all their cries,
Their clockwork and their merchandise,
Frolic of painted dolls. I pass unheeding.

The Night Ride

Gas flaring on the yellow platform; voices running up and down;
Milk-tins in cold dented silver; half-awake I stare,
Pull up the blind, blink out - all sounds are drugged;
the slow blowing of passengers asleep;
engines yawning; water in heavy drips;
Black, sinister travellers, lumbering up the station,
one moment in the window, hooked over bags;
hurrying, unknown faces - boxes with strange labels -
all groping clumsily to mysterious ends,
out of the gaslight, dragged by private Fates,
their echoes die. The dark train shakes and plunges;
bells cry out, the night-ride starts again.
Soon I shall look out into nothing but blackness,
pale, windy fields, the old roar and knock of the rails
melts in dull fury. Pull down the blind. Sleep. Sleep
Nothing but grey, rushing rivers of bush outside.
Gaslight and milk-cans. Of Rapptown I recall nothing else.

Thief of the Moon

Thief of the moon, thou robber of old delight,
Thy charms have stolen the star-gold, quenched the moon-
Cold, cold are the birds that, bubbling out of night,
Cried once to my ears their unremembered tune-
Dark are those orchards, their leaves no longer shine,
No orange's gold is globed like moonrise there-
O thief of the earth's old loveliness, once mine,
Why dost thou waste all beauty to make thee fair?

Break, break thy strings, thou lutanists of earth,
Thy musics touch me not-let midnight cover
With pitchy seas those leaves of orange and lime,
I'll not repent. The world's no longer worth
One smile from thee, dear pirate of place and time,
Thief of old loves that haunted once thy lover!

Stars

"THESE are the floating berries of the night,
They drop their harvest in dark alleys down,
Softly far down on groves of Venus, or on a little town
Forgotten at the world's edge—and O, their light
Unlocks all closed things, eyes and mouths, and drifts
Quietly over kisses in a golden rain,
Drowning their flight, till suddenly the Cyprian lifts
Her small, white face to the moon, then hides again.
"They are the warm candles of beauty, hung in blessing on high,
Poised like bright comrades on boughs of night above:
They are the link-boys of Queen Venus, running out of the sky,
Spilling their friendly radiance on all her ways of love.
"Should the girl's eyes be lit with swimming fire,
O do not kiss it away, it is a star, a star!"
So cried the passionate poet to his great, romantic guitar.
But I was beating off the stars, gazing, not rhyming.
I saw the bottomless, black cups of space
Between their clusters, and the planets climbing
Dizzily in sick airs, and desired to hide my face.
But I could not escape those tunnels of nothingness,
The cracks in the spinning Cross, nor hold my brain
From rushing for ever down that terrible lane,
Infinity's trap-door, eternal and merciless.

Sleep

Do you give yourself to me utterly,
Body and no-body, flesh and no-flesh
Not as a fugitive, blindly or bitterly,
But as a child might, with no other wish?
Yes, utterly.

Then I shall bear you down my estuary,
Carry you and ferry you to burial mysteriously,
Take you and receive you,
Consume you, engulf you,
In the huge cave, my belly, love you
With huge waves continually.

And you shall cling and clamber there
And slumber there, in that dumb chamber,
Beat with my blood's beat, hear my heart move
Blindly in bones that ride above you,
Delve in my flesh, dissolved and bedded,

Through viewless valves embodied so –
Till daylight, the expulsion and awakening,
The riving and the driving forth,
Life with remorseless forceps beckoning –
Pangs and betrayal of harsh birth.

A. D. HOPE

1907 – 2000

Alec Derwent Hope was born on 21 July 1907 at Cooma, in the Snowy Mountains area of southern New South Wales, where his father was a Presbyterian minister. He was educated at home and at schools in Tasmania and New South Wales as the family moved around to different parishes. Matriculating to Sydney University, he graduated Bachelor of Arts with majors in English and Philosophy in 1928 and won a scholarship to University College, Oxford. His Oxford career, however, was not a distinguished one; he returned to Sydney in 1932 with a disappointing third-class degree and trained as a teacher. In 1937 Hope married Penelope Robinson with whom he had three children. He was appointed lecturer in education at the Sydney Teachers' College in 1937, later becoming lecturer in English there from 1938-44. During the 1940s Hope took part in the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Children's Session, as 'Anthony Inkwell' conducting the literary section of the Argonaut's Club. In 1945 he moved to the University of Melbourne and in 1951 was appointed Professor of English at Canberra University College (later the Australian National University) where he taught until his retirement in 1968.

Although he had been writing for many years, Hope did not publish any of his poems until the 1930s. His first collection, *The Wandering Islands*, did not appear until 1955, by which time he had built a reputation as a poet through publications in various periodicals. It was praised for Hope's skilful use of traditional verse forms and critique of contemporary values and received the Grace Leven Poetry Prize. His second collection, *Poems* (1960), was published in London, underscoring the fact that for many years Hope was the best-known Australian poet internationally, appearing in many anthologies and receiving in 1965 the Arts Council of Great Britain Poetry Award, in 1968 the Levinson Prize for Poetry (Chicago) and in 1969 the Ingram Merrill Award for Literature (New York).

A small volume of selected poems, *A. D. Hope* (1963) in Angus and Robertson's Australian Poets series, was soon followed by *Collected Poems 1930-1965* (1966). Thereafter collections of new poems appeared at regular intervals, interspersed by new editions of *Selected Poems* in 1972, 1986 and 1992, the latter sharing the Australian Capital Territory Book of the Year Award for 1993. *A Late Picking: Poems 1965-1974* (1975) received The Age Book of the Year Award, Imaginative Writing Prize for 1976. The satiric note so strong in much of Hope's earlier work, and seen especially in his mock-heroic *Dunciad Minor* (1970), a contemporary version of English eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*, is less evident in his late poems. His interest in mythology, seen as embodying 'the great commonplaces' of human life, remained until the end, as is apparent in the title of his final collection *Orpheus* (1991).

In addition to his many volumes of poetry, Hope was a widely published critic, reviewer and editor. *The Cave and the Spring: Essays on Poetry* (1965) won both the 1965 Britannica-Australia Literary Award and the Volkswagon Award for 1966. After some years in a Canberra nursing home, Hope died on 13 July 2000. In 1981 he had been made a Companion of the Order of Australia for services to literature.

Australia

A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
In the field uniform of modern wars,
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: "we live" but "we survive",
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

The Drifting Continent

Black Mountain. Summer. All those years ago,
As though no further back than, say, last week,
That meeting of mammal with monotreme comes to mind.
The mountain above us, the parched plain below,
We sat in the dry gully of a dry creek;
I, picnicking with a female of my kind;

Two recent mammals, perhaps the last of all,
The strangest and most generalised, at least,
We shared our sandwich lunch, poured out our wine;
The air was shrill with locusts, I recall;
Ants and the pestering bush-flies joined our feast;
She sat and held her hairless paw in mine.

The ancient land enfolded us; our talk
Turned to its arid earth, the history
Of its archaic inhabitants adrift
On its pre-Cambrian shield and later rock,
Of their long isolation on the sea,
Progressing by that imperceptible shift,

Two centimetres a year, or so they say,
Mounted upon the great tectonic plate
On which it floats upon the mantle below,
And of ourselves, frail creatures of a day,
Yet the sole animal to contemplate
The irony of its own fierce urge to know.

'What other mammal recalls its past,' I said,
'But man and can remember all others too?'
She laughed and said: 'The Geophysical Year
Made possible that dialogue with the dead.
As for *our* place upon this drifting zoo,
Remember we are interlopers here.

'Placental mammals on marsupial ground,
We are trespassers on their continental raft
Inching its way up from the pole,' said she;
'But, though no fossil record has been found,
There was an older crew aboard this craft
Before those first marsupials put to sea.

'Before it set out from Gondwanaland,
Perhaps two hundred million years ago,
The earliest of mammals, or the last
Of links with bird and reptile held command
And this was monotreme country then, although

They vanished leaving no trace upon the past.

‘But two of them survive, the only two,
To help us guess what once they must have been.
One is the duck-billed platypus and one'.
The spiny anteater...’ As if on cue,
As she broke off, far down the dry ravine
A creature moved from shadow into sun;

And at its shuffling pace the echidna came
Towards us from the immemorial past
(We watched and held ourselves as still as death),
Pausing to lick up ants and such small game.
‘Here comes a member of your crew, at last,’
I muttered to my friend below my breath.

She did not speak or nod, but watched it quest
Slowly along the dry creek's sandy bed.
It seemed to waddle upon its powerful claws,
Here lifting a stone, scouring a meat-ant's nest
Turning from side to side its bird-like head.
Yet, though it seemed so often to loiter and pause,

It shambled level with us before we knew,
Halted and peered about with purblind eyes,
And seemed to sense, although it could not see,
The creatures on the bank. It sniffed my shoe
And snuffled; we saw the momentary rise
Of quills along its back; then quietly

Out of the pipe-like mouth a worm of tongue
Flickered and tasted all along the welt
And, as though puzzled, it stood there deep in thought
Till, having considered, it went its way along
The creek and round a bend. It must have felt
A tremor through the subsoil of some sort

Or heard me as I leapt to follow, for
Fast as I turned the corner, it was gone.
And yet how could it? The ravine ahead
Was bare and clear for fifteen yards or more.
I looked for hole or burrow: there was none.
Then my companion following laughed and said:

‘Try looking by your feet!’ And when I did
The sandy floor before me was astir
With points of spines: echidna had dug in
So fast that in five seconds it was hid.
‘Best leave him to himself,’ I said to her,
‘At least we have seen the race of mammals begin.’

She answered: 'But it could have been a dream.
We are too ephemeral to comprehend
Such motion as your continental drift.
Perhaps this meeting, for the monotreme,
Was no beginning, but presaged the end.
Man's landing on their raft was dire and swift.

'How many of its old crew have vanished, say,
As this one in the sand before your feet?
How many species since seventeen eighty-eight,
When we first came aboard this transport, may
Already count their massacre complete
(Outside the central deserts, at any rate)?'

'Man looks before and after,' I replied,
'I wonder where this curious ark is bound
And who, of all its internecine crew,
Will man it when, borne on the magmal tide,
On a more massive raft it runs aground,
As sister India is said to do?

'My bet's on the echidna, before man.
Man is too greedy to survive for long,
Needs too many gadgets to succeed;
Echidna needs no more than ants and can
Get by with no technology but its tongue.
When man has perished, with all that served his greed,

'I see our drifting continent arrive,
Echidna and ants alone on board.
— Some of man's ruins, perhaps, for what they're worth.'
'Or if he wins, perhaps *no* creature alive
May make that landfall when, not fire and sword,
But effluents and his filth have killed the earth.

'Should life renew itself in time to come,
Some new intelligence may find it moored
Against a young uplifted mountain crest,
Or still adrift, and wonder at the doom
That overtook its crew; like those aboard
That sea-enigma, the *Mary Celeste*.'

'Mary of Heaven, great mammary mamma,
Star of the Sea, to whom all mammals pray,
Will she protect us yet?' I asked. We laughed
Questioning, should we invoke an older star,
A more archaic saint, who in their day
Blessed monotremes and piloted their craft.

We laughed, but with a deep and growing unease.
We had lost our human assurance of thought and speech.

The elemental silence deprived our breath;
Lost in the tale of all those centuries,
We were no longer persons, each to each,
But ciphers in a species bound for death.

The Death of the Bird

For every bird there is this last migration;
Once more the cooling year kindles her heart;
With a warm passage to the summer station
Love pricks the course in lights across the chart.

Year after year a speck on the map, divided
By a whole hemisphere, summons her to come;
Season after season, sure and safely guided,
Going away she is also coming home.

And being home, memory becomes a passion
With which she feeds her brood and straws her nest,
Aware of ghosts that haunt the heart's possession
And exiled love mourning within the breast.

The sands are green with a mirage of valleys;
The palm tree casts a shadow not its own;
Down the long architrave of temple or palace
Blows a cool air from moorland scarps of stone.

And day by day the whisper of love grows stronger;
That delicate voice, more urgent with despair,
Custom and fear constraining her no longer,
Drives her at last on the waste leagues of air.

A vanishing speck in those inane dominions,
Single and frail, uncertain of her place,
Alone in the bright host of her companions,
Lost in the blue unfriendliness of space.

She feels it close now, the appointed season;
The invisible thread is broken as she flies;
Suddenly, without warning, without reason,
The guiding spark of instinct winks and dies.

Try as she will, the trackless world delivers
No way, the wilderness of light no sign;
Immense, complex contours of hills and rivers
Mock her small wisdom with their vast design.

The darkness rises from the eastern valleys,
And the winds buffet her with their hungry breath,
And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice,
Receives the tiny burden of her death.

Tasmanian Magpies

Ethiopia! They used to say,
Fluting at dawn through pure, clear rills of sound,
The magpies of that earlier day,
Ethiopia! Ethiopia! From all around.
Dulcimer of no Abyssinian maid
Was ever so plangent or so doucely played.
Ethiopia, Ethiopia!
Echoes went through me of Mount Abora.

Another country, another age! I still
Hear them at early morning in the trees;
The same pure grace notes, the same exquisite trill,
The lilt, the liquid ease,
But not the enchantment of that warbled name;
The magpie dialect here is not the same;
The magic syllables have gone
That brought me full awake and roused the sun.

Lost Ethiopia. Is that loss in me?
Monaro magpies bursting into song
Soar through new cadences, fresh jubilee;
But in an unknown tongue
Rejoice. Can it perhaps be true
That I have lost those languages I knew
In boyhood, when each bird,
Stone, cloud and every tree that grew
Spoke and I had by heart all that I heard?

Morning Meditation

Every day of my life
I shave the beard from my chin,
Suppress the natural man,
Do my bit in the strife
To keep original sin
As much at bay as I can.

Day after day after day,
I wake and lather and scrape;
Looking myself in the eye
I grin at my image and say:
Look at the hairy ape
Wishing himself goodbye!

Grand-dad, he had a beard,
Randy old son of a gun!
Even when it was white
He, if a wench appeared,
Would roar to get her to run
And catch and cuddle her tight.

Father, too, had a black
Stubble upon his chin;
Every day of his life
With a hollow blade he would hack
At the natural man within—
He did it to pleasure his wife.

She was a handsome jade,
Black, undauntable eyes,
Snug bottom and well-turned calf;
When Father had stropped his blade,
He would reach between her thighs,
Pluck out a hair and laugh.

Then in his sixtieth year,
Seeing the black jowl hoar,
He lathered and gave a groan,
Took himself by the ear,
Picked up the blade once more,
And cut his throat to the bone.

Grandfather took his fun,
Rolled in all manner of hay;
Father could bell the cat
But died of seeing it done;
I keep the beast at bay

With a safety razor, at that!

Having no child or wife,
Sin or superfluous hair,
I live by the Golden Rule.
And every day of my life
I think of that sinful pair
And curse myself for a fool.

Morning Coffee

Reading the menu at the morning service:
- Iced Venusberg perhaps, or buttered bum -
Orders the usual sex-ersatz, and, nervous,
Glances around - Will she or won't she come?

The congregation dissected into pews
Gulping their strip teas in the luminous cavern
Agape's sacramental berry stews;
The nickel-plated light and clatter of heaven

Receive him, temporary Tantalus
Into the Lookingglassland's firescape.
Suckled on Jungfraumilch his eyes discuss,
The werwolf twins, their mock Sabellian rape.

This is their time to reap the standing scorn,
Blonde Rumina's crop. Beneath her leafless tree
Ripe-rumped she lolls and clasps the plenteous horn.
Cool customers who defy his Trinity

Feel none the less, and thrill, ur-vater Fear
Caged in the son. For, though this ghost behave
Experienced daughters recognize King Leer:
Lot also had his daughters in a cave.

Full sail the proud three-decker sandwiches
With the eye-fumbled priestesses repass;
On their swan lake the enchanted ice creams freeze,
The amorous fountain prickles in the glass

And at the introit of this mass emotion
She comes, she comes, a balanced pillar of blood,
Guides through the desert, divides the sterile ocean,
Brings sceptic Didymus his berserk food,

Sits deftly, folding elegant thighs, and takes
Her time. She skins her little leather hands,
Conscious that wavering towards her like tame snakes
The polyp eyes converge.... The prophet stands

Dreading the answer from her burning bush:
This unconsuming flame, the outlaw's blow,
Plague, exodus, Sinai, ruptured stones that gush,
God's telegram: Dare Now! Let this people go!

Standardisation

When, darkly brooding on this Modern Age,
The journalist with his marketable woes
Fills up once more the inevitable page
Of fatuous, flatulent, Sunday-paper prose;

Whenever the green aesthete starts to whoop
With horror at the house not made with hands
And when from vacuum cleaners and tinned soup
Another pure theosophist demands

Rebirth in other, less industrial stars
Where huge towns thrust up in synthetic stone
And films and sleek miraculous motor cars
And celluloid and rubber are unknown;

When from his vegetable Sunday School
Emerges with the neatly maudlin phrase
Still one more Nature poet, to rant or drool
About the "Standardisation of the Race";

I see, stooping among her orchard trees,
The old, sound Earth, gathering her windfalls in,
Broad in the hams and stiffening at the knees,
Pause and I see her grave malicious grin.

For there is no manufacturer competes
With her in the mass production of shapes and things.
Over and over she gathers and repeats
The cast of a face, a million butterfly wings.

She does not tire of the pattern of a rose.
Her oldest tricks still catch us with surprise.
She cannot recall how long ago she chose
The streamlined hulls of fish, the snail's long eyes,

Love, which still pours into its ancient mould
The lashing seed that grows to a man again,
From whom by the same processes unfold
Unending generations of living men.

She has standardised his ultimate needs and pains.
Lost tribes in a lost language mutter in
His dreams: his science is tethered to their brains,
His guilt merely repeats Original Sin.

And beauty standing motionless before
Her mirror sees behind her, mile on mile,

A long queue in an unknown corridor,
Anonymous faces plastered with her smile.

X-Ray Photograph

Mapped by its panoply of shade
There is the skull I shall not see
—Dark hollow in its galaxy
From which the blazing eye must fade—

And, though I cannot see it plain,
Within those stellar spaces roll
The countless sparks and whorls of soul:
My constellation of the brain.

These bones are calm and beautiful;
The flesh, like water, strains and clears
To show the face my future wears
Drowned at the bottom of its pool.

Then I am full of rage and bliss,
For in our naked bed I feel,
Mate of your panting mouth as well,
The death's head lean toward your kiss;

And I am mad to have you here,
Now, Now, the instant shield of lust,
Deep in your flesh my flesh to thrust
Against a more tremendous fear.

For in a last analysis
The mind had finer rays that show
The woof of atoms, and below
The mathematical abyss;

The solid bone dissolving just
As this dim pulp about the bone;
And whirling in its void alone
Yearns a fine interstitial dust.

The ray that melts away my skin
Pales at that sub-atomic wave:
This shows my image in the grave,
But that the emptiness within

By which I know our contacts are
Delusive as a point of light
That froths against my shores of sight
Sent out from the remotest star,

So spent, that great sun's fiery head
Is scarcely visible; a ray

So ancient that it brings today
Word from a world already dead.

Easter Hymn

Make no mistake; there will be no forgiveness;
No voice can harm you and no hand will save;
Fenced by the magic of deliberate darkness
You walk on the sharp edges of the wave;

Trouble with soul again the putrefaction
Where Lazarus three days rotten lies content.
Your human tears will be the seed of faction
Murder the sequel to your sacrament.

The City of God is built like other cities:
Judas negotiates the loans you float;
You will meet Caiaphas upon committees;
You will be glad of Pilate's casting vote.

Your truest lovers still the foolish virgins,
Your heart will sicken at the marriage feasts
Knowing they watch you from the darkened gardens
Being polite to your official guests.

Advice To A Poet

As you walk through the garden of this world,
Holding in your hands this crystal Now,
Passed down by Father Adam from son to son,
See on every bush the meanings furled
In tight unopening buds; then look and know
How in this glass they open one by one;

How as you tend your vines and plant and hoe,
These buds become your poems and fill the air
With longing, with madness. But, when the petals fall,
Thick on the bough the ripening apples grow
For somebody's wife who knows you set them there
As the recurring sacraments of her Fall.

Then show your age the discipline of that tree;
Show them the images common sense denied;
Teach them to hear the music of all they do;
Replant their garden of innocence; let them see
Beyond the markets of power, chimneys of pride,
Man in free fall, never quite knowing where to.

But never forget the garden, never forget
That's where he falls from, that's where he longs to return;
Always remember the launching site and the bride
Intoning his count-down: "Ready, get ready, get set,
GO!" As he blasts, he opens his orders to learn
Too late, the lady has taken him for a ride.

"Ah well, they are always looking for someone to launch,"
He reflects, and adds: "But that's what women are for;
Look at me now: I *thought* I was going to bed!"
The expendable sex, he opens his sandwich lunch,
Corrects his course dead on for the Evening Star
And grins as he taps out his message: "Trouble ahead!"

When she reads that out, someone is sure to laugh;
And that's where your job begins: the function of verse
Is to provide a carrier-wave for the soul's
Venture into the void; and the epitaph
Of the doomed explorers of the universe
Is the map you make from their log-books; between two poles

Called "I leave" and "I love", their ego-sounding devices
Probe her cloud-mantle, crying: "Is any one there?"
Their instruments crackle and spit in the cosmic wind.
Out of that white noise yours is the ear that prises
Signals which plotted in series show the bare

Body of Venus they came so far to find.

So tell them: they will not believe you; they will not even
Comprehend what you say about that planet.

They will jeer at the crystal you carry in your hands;

But tell them, tell them: their need to be forgiven

Will make them listen. Listen yourself for the minute

When tears break through as somebody understands.

But one thing you must not tell, though of course you know it,

Since all that we are hangs on this thought alone:

The word that we carry within us only for God.

What father Adam, the exile, the bare-arse poet,

Taught me, I teach to you: learn, practise and pass it on!

(Now read my lines again: this is a message in code.)

Conversation with Calliope

Finierat dictos e nobis maxima cantus

The proper way to start a poem
Built on the old high generous plan
Is to invoke the Muse; and, though I'm
Bound to placate the harridan,
She can't expect an epic proem:
The trick's been lost; the best she can
Look for in these degenerate times
Is an *O Thou* to start the rhymes.

"*O Thou!*"—You see it does sound silly—
"*Descend, my Muse!*"—and that sounds worse.
"Descend and—" "Don't be Uncle Willy!"
She says, appearing just like nurse,
The antiseptic smile, the chilly:
"Well, Master Alec, writing verse?
I'm sure I've told you times enough
I can't be bothered with your stuff.

"Now that you're fat and over forty,
It's rather odd, you must agree,
My sisters having all proved haughty
Though wooed with assiduity,
You find that after all your *forte*
Was writing epic poetry;
And offer me this slightly battered
Bald rhymester—well, I'm scarcely flattered!"

"I'm very sorry, Miss," I mutter,
"Indeed I beg your pardon, Ma'am!
But though we poets spread the butter,

The Muses must supply the jam.
The flood of things I have to utter
Threatens, you see, to burst the dam,
Without your aid, to whom belong
The lost arts of heroic song.

"You may be right about my figure;
It has perhaps filled out of late.
There's no denying that a wig or
Toupee might enhance my pate.
But while you name with wonted vigour
Defects I grant without debate,
Yet there is one aspersion I
Must categorically deny:

“Your imputation of neglect,
That only in the last resort
With failing powers or prospects wrecked
I turn to pay you tardy court,
This, with concern, I must reject.
At fifteen years, or less, I sought
Your aid, and with that aid began
An epic on the Doom of Man.

“Though I suppose its verse was far
From mastery and blank at best,
Though Browning was the avatar
The style too well made manifest,
While Renan's *Abbesse de Jouarre*
Supplied my scheme, yet all the rest
Was mine: contrivance, persons, tales
Made up in Bathurst, New South Wales.

“I gave it up, as you recall,
Before the end of Canto Two,
But not till I had planned it all,
Nor, though a child, until I knew
My bent and heard the poet's call
That brings his promised land in view.
Though forty years have passed I still
Have not forgotten Pisgah's hill.

“Who that has known it can forget
That first fierce moment of elation
When a young poet feels the jet
And vigour of his inspiration?
Not fame achieved compares, nor yet
Can love's supreme intoxication.
And at that moment you were there
And smiling bent above my chair.”

“I own,” she answers less irately,
“That once you seemed a likely lad.
But think of all I've suffered lately,
The family troubles that I've had.
A sister can't sit by sedately
And see things going to the bad:
There's poor Miss Clio's lost her wits;
Euterpe cursed with sinking fits;

“Terpsichore reels home each night
As drunk as any fiddler's bitch;
And, since the time has passed you might
Behold the Muse without a stitch,
Turned prude at last and laced too tight

Thalia's caught a nasty itch;
Unhinged by neurasthenic dreams
Melpomene just sits and screams;

“Erato—though, I won't deny it,
She keeps her health and earns her crust—
Has lost her figure, needs a diet
And uplift for a sagging bust,
Spends half her nights in maudlin riot
And works for an Amusement Trust;
Urania's lost the common touch
And only talks in Double Dutch;

“And Polyhymnia's on a pension:
The sacred arts are out of date;
Gods are not asked for intervention
To save a technocratic state;
And if by chance or by intention
She's present when they celebrate,
It is with an embarrassed air
She mumbles some archaic prayer;

“As for myself, I must admit I
Am on the shelf, and that's a fact,
The ramparts of my Trojan city
In ruins and its temples sacked,
And not by poets, more's the pity,
Critics and scholars range the tract
Where Milton sang the world's *Te Deum*
To pick up bits for their museum.

“For since society has ended
Its ancient pact with the divine,
The public actions which depended
On common faith to make them shine
Once gone, what use is left the splendid
Impetus of the epic line?
The chronicle of prose survives
For the small beer of private lives.

“My sister Clio shares, of course,
At least a measure of the blame;
An epic loses half its force
Not built round some historic name,
Some legend which at least for source
Has deeds that Truth will not disclaim;
Its greatness rests on a conviction
That heroes happen outside fiction.

“And since historical research
Has lost the name of noble action,

Proved most ideas in state and church
Mere subterfuge of greed and faction,
That great men do not lead: they lurch
Between rebellion and reaction,
By documented texts it can
Abolish the Uncommon Man.

“And as for the Uncommon Woman
Who blessed the Hero's hearth and bed,
Divine Calypso or the human
Penelope he chose instead,
Your psychological acumen
Thrusts in where angels fear to tread
And proves her something in between
A mirage and a love-machine.”

“Madam,” I say, “although no stranger
To the misfortunes you relate,
I can't believe your fame in danger
Or think the mode so out of date;
For though the dog is in the manger,
No hand has locked the stable gate:
The wingèd horse is free and still
May light upon your sacred hill.

“The Muses and the modes you mention
Have fallen, I grant, on evil days;
Slovenly craft and cheap invention
May parch the spring and blast the bays,
Your art alone, without declension
Preserves its splendour and its praise.”
“Poor comfort,” she retorts, “and small
When no one writes it now at all.

“The epics of the past perhaps
Survive like Tadmor in the waste,
Impressive still, but in the lapse
Of ages men first lose the taste
And then the skill; while, on the maps
Their sites forgotten or misplaced,
They wait, as ancient ruins should,
For Horace Walpole's Mr Wood.

“There was a time the poet's mission
Was to give men their daily bread,
The crown of life, the timeless vision
Which linked the living with the dead.
When Homer spoke, the great tradition
Of verse commanded, taught and led;
With Milton it began to nod,
And Cowley was its *Ichabod*.

“ ‘Who now reads Cowley?’ Who indeed
Reads Homer now or his translator
But schoolboys and the dons who breed
Their kind in every empty crater?
Can some fresh Milton rise to feed
Blind mouths in Learning's incubator,
Or Pegasus his flight renew
Boiled down for academic glue?

“For after Cowley came Defoe's
Invention of domestic fiction;
The comic epic dressed in prose
Drove out heroic deeds and diction;
Pamela's budget of chaste woes
Pleased more than Homer's whole depiction
Of Troy and Milton's War with Hell
Less than the Death of Little Nell.

“So by a sort of Gresham's Law
The novel rose, the epic died,
Nor could be resurrected nor
Remade, for all that Arnold tried.
‘What did they kill each other for?’
Old Kaspar's small granddaughter cried,
Which marked, since Kaspar could not say,
How a whole world had passed away.

“Well, if you still would venture on it,
Go in and try it: you will find
To poems longer than a sonnet
Your readers deaf, your critics blind.
Even the few prepared to con it
Will lack enlargement of the mind.
No lion-soul acquires its habit
From close acquaintance with the rabbit.

“Long narratives are out of fashion;
Sustained invention does not please;
And sacred truth and moral passion
Belong to former centuries.
Yet epic stakes its reputation
On public taste for things like these.
Readers who give your poem a glance
Will settle for a police romance.”

“All that you urge is cogent, Madam,”
I say, “and sure the Muse knows best;
Yet if a simple son of Adam
May speak and venture to contest,
The epic gifts, suppose I had 'em,

Will quickly put me to the test
And if I fail, I may at least
Make way against the Blatant Beast.”

“Well, if you must, you must, my hearty,”
She answers with a little frown.
“If *con amore* match *con arte*,
My scholar yet may grace the gown.
But if we must prolong this party,
You might invite me to sit down,
For legs, though not of mortal clay
Will tire and I have more to say.”

“A thousand pardons, pray be seated;
Allow me to pull up a chair!
Forgive me, being somewhat heated,
If I forget the proper care
With which the Muses should be treated:
Their visits are extremely rare.
To honour this poor house of mine,
May I suggest a glass of wine?”

“Thank you, although the drink I treasure
I don't suppose you have—I mean
Of course to ask you for a measure
Of pure, unblushing Hippocrene?
No? Well, I should accept with pleasure
A drop of anything between
From nectar down to mortal pottle;
No glasses though: bring out the bottle!”

The wine poured out, I take my chair.
She tastes and nods and says: “Not bad!
Now let's get back to where we were:
Your epic poem. Suppose you had
The wit, have you the time to spare?
That *jeu d'esprit*, your *Dunciad*,
Cost you six months, as I recall,
And only four books, after all.

“Four books and comic stuff at that,
And yet it caused you quite a coil
Before you had it neat and pat,
Long days of unremitting toil
And nights of labour when you sat
Keeping your modest pot aboil
Or tossed in fever on your bed
With verses seething in your head.

“Can you conceive the dedication
Those mighty works demand? Or can

You summon up the concentration,
That service of the entire man
Required to plan, to mould, to fashion
To grind the grain and bolt the bran?
A task so long, so great, so dread,
So Pope, my foster child, once said,

“As leaves a man, this side the grave,
Scarce time to breathe, no time to be
Friend, neighbour, husband, nay, to have
The care to plant and tend a tree,
Much less in the long run, to save
His soul or meet eternity.
If not, just fold the napkin round
And hide your talent in the ground.”

“Ah, there's the rub indeed,” I say;
“The doubt you raise, I feel and share it.
Most poets are employed today,
Own cars, eat well, drink vintage claret
—Your glass is empty by the way—
Hogarth's poor poet in his garret
Or truckling at a patron's board
Has gone for ever, praise the Lord!

“But though the Lord be praised, I wonder
Are poets so much better off?
Though now they have their share of plunder
And get both forefeet in the trough,
To earn their bread they have to squander
The hours they once were masters of;
In fact the poet's calling pays
Much worse than in the bad old days.

“Those bad old days (would they were with us!)
Saw Ariosto trim his light,
Debase his art, deploy his mythus
To lick the boots of Este's knight.
Well, let it wring the critic's withers,
At least he had the time to write.
Odd jobs as envoy or commando
Still left him years for his *Orlando*.

“Admit he flattered, grant the note
Of adulation gross and crass,
The King of France who turned his coat
Considered Paris worth a mass.
And shall I sneer while I devote
My days to lecture-room and class?
There's nothing sours the Muses' soil
Like eight good hours of honest toil.

“And while that garden blights and sours
On which a full sun rarely shines,
The poets labour after hours
To raise a crop of stunted lines,
Like serfs who round the baron's towers
By day manure the baron's vines
And, while exhausted muscles groan,
By moonlight cultivate their own.

“The serf well knew the serf's condition;
He knew his wine was harsh and thin.
The well-fed poet's dwindling vision
Soon cuts his coat to suit his skin,
Thinks the great tuns of the tradition
Not equal to his kilderkin,
And that no House of Fame surpasses
His week-end cottage on Parnassus.

“See Esau tamed, in Jacob's lobby
Run errands now for Jacob's house;
His birthright bartered for a job, he
Plans mountains that bring forth a mouse;
For art diminished to a hobby
Yields just what hobby-time allows.
Why does he do it? Save your breath:
As poet he would starve to death.

“Take my own case: the world of letters
Is what, God help me, I profess;
For lecturing about my betters
Each year they pay me more or less
Four thousand pounds. Ask what I get as
Poet!—at a random guess
For poems forged with sweat and tears,
Four hundred pounds in forty years!

“Now take the Greeks—” Says she, “Young fellow
I'd rather hear you on the purse.
Your theme grows warm as you grow mellow
(Though frequently your rhymes get worse).
Let's take the Greeks; but please don't bellow.
You argue prettily in verse.
Go on! I like to hear you speak,
Especially as you know no Greek.

“And on the Greeks, you might recall,
The towns which strove for Homer dead
To build him a memorial
Were those where Homer begged his bread.
There never was an age at all

Gave poets three meals and a bed
Though every age is apt to cast
Regretful glances at the past.

“In every Paradise, professor,
The charmer lures, the serpent lurks;
When academic chores depress or
Committees gall and teaching irks,
Just think of Chaucer, the Assessor
Of Customs and the Clerk of Works;
And yet by candlelight he made
The time for *Troilus and Criseyde*.

“Think of Camoens as trustee
Serving the absent and the dead;
Hated, reviled, imprisoned, he
Could still contrive his *Lusiad*;
View Milton in his misery
Unfaltering, and Tasso mad,
And judge if your condition bears
The least comparison with theirs.

“What genius has a mind to speak
Mere circumstance will rarely throttle,
But, if the wine is thin and weak,
It makes no sense to blame the bottle.
Our hidden cause is still to seek;
It is not found in Aristotle
For he was born before the long
Decline and fall of epic song.

“He knew it at its peak and prime
And gave no thought to its decay.
Longinus too, on the sublime,
On this had nothing much to say
And Vida looked to see it climb
To greater triumphs in his day.
But what the worthies never knew
The steadfast Muses keep in view.

“The gift of prophecy they hold,
Although it is the lesser gift,
The past and future they behold
And poets sometimes catch its drift,
Catch glimpses of the Age of Gold
And sometimes see the curtain lift
Upon the face of things to come
When other oracles are dumb.

“But though the Muse bestows the vision
She very seldom gives it scope,

Lest prophecy subvert his mission
By fostering the poet's hope
Through dim surmise and intuition
To cast creation's horoscope:
The task for which we grant the bays
Is still to celebrate and praise.

“That task in which he may not shirk or
Falter, on his hope of bliss,
Die unbegreiflich hohen Werke
(The Devil himself once vouched for this)
Is, nobly, without crank or quirk or
Default, to show it as it is,
And through his art to bring to birth
New modes of being on the earth.

“This is the task that we assign,
Not to haruspicate or scry;
The poet's part in the divine
Stops this side of divinity—
Let's have another flask of wine
Before I start to prophesy,
For now the time has come to show
Things that the Muse alone can know.”

I fetch the second bottle out
And while I draw the cork, I ask:
“First would you please resolve a doubt?
If celebration is our task,
I think I know what *that's* about;
The second part still wears the mask.
What does it mean—or must I wait?—
New modes of being to create?”

“Some truths can not be uttered save
By myth,” she says, “or like recourses:
(Socrates' Fable of the Cave;
Swift's Fable of the Talking Horses).
Though Wittgenstein turn in his grave,
The mind has other means and forces
‘Whereof one cannot speak’ to show
The inenarrable we know.

“So, *pace* Wittgenstein, I shall
Tell you my meaning in a fable;
And, though you may not grasp it all,
It has a grace which may enable
The heart to answer to its call;
While Logic builds its Tower of Babel
The truth it seeks and seeks in vain
May fall like dew upon the plain.

“In the beginning was the Word
—My myth, you see, is scarcely new—
But though it *was*, it was not heard;
The earth was void and nothing grew
Upon the barren rock; no bird
Flashed singing through the barren blue,
And in the blue and barren deep
There was no life to swim or creep.

“It was as wild a world to see
As e'er returned its Maker thanks:
Mountains in savage majesty
Thrust upward in colossal ranks
And searing ice and scorching scree
Ground slowly down their ragged flanks,
While plains upheaving from their beds
Dried out in desert browns and reds.

“And then the Word began to move,
Itself unmoved, the quickening Will,
By infinitesimals it wove
As in the womb it quickens still.
The endless edifice of love
Felt life's first step upon its sill
And in that primal globule furled
Lay all the orders of the world.

“Orders of being come to birth
Evolving in the cosmic dance.
Each fills and each creates a dearth
Filled by the next in its advance:
Enfolding to transform the earth
First came the mantle of the plants
And with the beasts in their degrees
Made up the living entities.

“The joy to see that green brocade
Bald scarps and shadow lake and rill,
Carpet bare clays with lawn and glade
Is something hard to grasp, until
One sees the dead moon-landscape made
By an abandoned copper mill
(As in Tasmania you have seen)
Breathe, burgeon and resume its green.

“Then gradual in the womb of kind
The second mystery began:
The order of the conscious mind
Perfected in the race of man,
Gave eyes to groping needs and blind

And freed the will to search and plan,
A revolution as profound
As that which clothed the barren ground.

“Civilization when it came,
After long ages in the mould,
Formed the new hearth for a new flame,
Though kindled first in tribes too old
To leave a history or a name,
Or see from magic arts unfold
Within the world of mind the third
Order of being from the Word.

“Freed from those ends which men foresee
And meet with predisposing skill,
The arts themselves propose the free
And unknown ends which they fulfil.
To shape the new entelechy
Of life, the autotelic will
Transfigures and transforms the span
Of all we mean by social man.

“But here I ought to make a pause.
You catch my drift?—So far, so good.
New modes of being, till their laws
Prevail cannot be understood
Beyond the process and the cause;
The end will still be misconstrued
By minds unable to apply
The logic of analogy.

“For instance, scientists agree
In thinking, and they may be right,
There was a time when none could see
Except in shades of black and white.
What must it have been like to be
The first few born with colour-sight,
And how could they explain or find
Words to convince the colour-blind?

“That passion of scarlet, turquoise, gold
In feather, scale or leaf or shell,
Orchid or rose as they unfold
Their delicate, breathless miracle,
How could those drab, grey minds be told
With only grey, drab words to tell,
And lash or straitjacket, no doubt,
For those who dared to brave it out.

“Anger or pity, or derision
Would be the least they could expect

Yet, see, they have imposed their vision
And made their foes a dwindling sect,
Achieved by means of binary fission
What argument could not effect;
So, *verbum sap.*, don't preach or shout—
Just work to bring the thing about.

“But now, my friend, we have to turn
To that deferred, prophetic answer;
You cannot guess, divine or learn
The cause, so hear it while you can, sir,
Why epic cannot yet return.
I promised in an earlier stanza
Footnotes to Malthus and remarks
On certain doctrines of Karl Marx.

“But what I have to tell embraces
Much more than Marx or Malthus guessed.
The future of the human race is
Somewhat precarious at best.
The day when mere survival places
All other values to the test
May not be far away; indeed
Man's deadliest instinct is to breed.

“And breeding as he does unchecked
By Nature, Law or Common Caution,
No cornucopia can expect
To pour forth plenty in proportion,
Nor human skills for long perfect
New means to eke his dwindling portion:
Since self-control is too much bother
They'll end by eating one another.

“My main concern of course is not
This anthropophagous dilemma;
Not last decay but that first spot,
The earthquake's first foreboding tremor.
The final inference is what
Should be implicit in the lemma
And what must bring man to the worst
May well pervert his nature first.

“A plague like locusts, lemmings, lice
Breaks out like fire, typhoon, or flood,
And swiftly as it grows, it dies;
The human plague, less understood
Through slow millennia takes its rise,
At every step, so far so good!
And yet as each divide is crossed,
Some measure of the whole is lost.

“Man wants but little, even so
By little wants he is misled:
‘Man wants but little here,’ you know,
‘Nor wants that little long,’ was said
By Edwin just about to throw
Fair Angelina on his bed;
Which lost the girl her pilgrim's permit,
And left him an unlicensed hermit.

“Their vows abandoned with their habits
The ‘Law of Measure’ set aside
Alas, the phrase is Irving Babbit's,
This precious hermit and his bride
Bred, as you might expect, like rabbits
And had produced before they died,
Counting great-grandchildren as well,
Two hundred from that single cell.

“But death by then was just the stitch in
Time devoutly wished by both.
They'd seen the life their love was rich in
Imperilled by its very growth.
It is not only in a kitchen
Too many cooks can spoil a broth,
And families perish by inflation
Into a tribe, a horde, a nation.

“What Edwin found to be the case
Proves true in history's arena:
Huntress or victim of the chase,
Angelica or Angelina,
Each future mother of the race
So ravishing in her demeanour,
By instinct still, and natural bent, is
Another Sorcerer's Apprentice.

“No hunter of the Age of Fable
Had need to buckle in his belt;
More game than he was ever able
To take ran wild upon the veldt;
Each night with roast he stocked his table,
Then procreated on the pelt.
And that is how, of course, there came
At last to be more men than game.

“No matter: man's invention can
Snatch triumph from his worst mistakes.
Soon cuts of beef and pork began
To take the place of feral steaks,
Next bread, and sifting out the bran

He turned his plain loaf into cakes.
—And as for cake, mankind will do
Their best to eat and have it too.

“It does not work: a time must come
—A fact that man is slow to learn—
Patch, plan, put off, explore and plumb,
You face the point of no return;
The Providential Voice is dumb,
And Wisdom, weeping by her urn,
Proffers in place of Nature's fruits
Synthetic pulps as substitutes.

“Effects of over-population
Converge, no matter where you start;
The economics of inflation
Follows the same curve on the chart
To where *ersatz* provides the ration
Alike for belly, mind or heart.
Then Muses geared for mass production
We make, to save *us* from seduction.

“For though it once made Plato groan,
Deceptions in the cause of grace,
We use at times and freely own.
The singer of the Works and Days
Watching his lambs on Helicon
Learned this and told it in a phrase:
‘The Muses speak true things at will,
Though falsehoods lie within their skill.’

“Already these factitious muses
Spread their synthetic wares abroad;
Their sooterkins promote their views as
Members of Trust and Fund and Board;
The Great Society produces
Only the arts it can afford,
Stamped, sterilized and tinned and tested
And standardized and predigested.

“Quite soon, let Observation view,
As systems and their nostrums cramp us,
The world from China to Peru,
The wild from taigá to pampas,
The last tame bison in the zoo,
The last tame poet on the campus
Is all she'll find, poor Observation,
Of all the former free creation.

“Well, there's your answer! In a word
To look for natural forms from this

Synthetic template is absurd.
The Word itself, their genesis
And goal withdraws and is not heard:
With Man disposing, God in his
Good time can scarce propose, or move
By patient, prescient, procreant love.

“So first the great forms, as I said
A while ago, must disappear.
Epic, like tragedy, is dead;
The doom of all the rest is near,
Just as this wine whose living red
Delights the sense must go, I fear,
For where the vineyard stood, will be
A Coca-Cola factory.”

So saying she takes her glass in token
And drains it off and sets it by,
The silence as we sit unbroken
By motion, syllable or sigh,
While in my face she reads unspoken
Sad scrutinies of how and why,
And then at last to my relief
She smiles and intercepts my grief.

“There is no need for you to ask it:
If this is how the arts collapse,
Are all the eggs then in one basket?
Do all the poets then, poor chaps,
Labour in vain? And is the task it
Pleases us to set, perhaps
Mere throwing dust against the wind,
As pointless as it is unkind?”

“Why yes,” I answer, “while agreeing
That Sodom's arts prevail of late,
Shall no just man succeed in fleeing,
Leaving salt witness at the gate?
And what of those new modes of being
The Muse assigns us to create?
Can, while her mysteries unfold,
She palter, and blow hot and cold?”

“Look in my eyes,” she says, “and read

The answer to that doubt, my friend!”
And in that depthless gaze indeed,
Where all uncertainties have end,
Where lights in endless Light recede
And all the partial visions blend,
Rapt by its Universal theme

I hear her speak, yet seem to dream:

“Although the great Un-culture wins,
Though Sodom's values tip the scales,
Another providence begins,
The Word withdraws but never fails:
As in past ages, dressed in skins
And following the forest trails,
In those vast woods, each little clan
Preserved the entity of Man,

“So in this next barbarian age,
Small clans we choose and hold apart,
Some few in whom the heavenly rage
Still blazes and keeps pure the heart;
The human jungle sets the stage
Where these new Levites learn their part:
To guard the coals and keep them fanned
And bear them towards the Promised Land.

“Good-bye my friend, the gift of sleep
I leave you, not my gift of song—
That epic power alone I keep
For one unborn. You waited long
But did not sow and shall not reap.
To you the lower slopes belong,
To him the peaks when time is due.
Now sleep—for I have much to do.”

Imperial Adam

Imperial Adam, naked in the dew,
Felt his brown flanks and found the rib was gone
Puzzled he turned and saw where, two by two,
The mighty spoor of Jahweh marked the lawn.

Then he remembered the mysterious sleep,
The surgeon fingers probing at the bone,
The voice so far away, so rich and deep:
"It is not good for him to live alone."

Turing once more, he found Man's counterpart
In tender parody breathing at his side.
He knew her at first sight, he knew by heart
Her allegory of sense unsatisfied.

The pawpaw drooped its golden breasts above
Less generous than the honey of her flesh;
The innocent sunlight showed the place of love;
The dew on its dark hairs winked crisp and fresh.

This plump gourd severed from his virile root
She promised on the turf of Paradise
Delicious pulp of the forbidden fruit;
Sly as the snake she loosed her sinuous thighs,

And waking, smiled up at him from the grass;
Her breasts rose softly and he heard her sigh.
From all the beasts whose pleasant task it was
In Eden to increase and multiply

Adam had learned the jolly deed of kind:
Her took her in his arms and there and then,
Like the clean beasts, embracing from behind,
Began in joy to found the breed of men.

Then from the spurt of seed within her broke
Her terrible and triumphant female cry,
Split upward by the sexual lightning stroke.
It was the beasts now who stood watching by:

The gravid elephant, the calving hind,
The breeding bitch, the she-ape big with young
Were the first gentle midwives of mankind;
The teeming lioness rasped her with her tongue;

The proud vicuna nuzzled her as she slept
Lax on the grass; and Adam watching too

Saw how her dumb breasts at their ripening wept,
The great pod of her belly swelled and grew,

And saw its water break, and saw, in fear,
Its quaking muscles in the act of birth,
Between her legs a pigmy face appear,
And the first murderer lay upon the earth.

What the Serpent Really Said

What Eve told Adam he said, and we believe
As he believed her, stands in Genesis;
But what the Serpent really said to Eve,
Among the dappled leaves that day, was this:

O innocent, naked, still unbroken reed,
Clasp with your naked hand this perfect fruit.
Within you both there sleeps the deathless seed,
Though neither of you from any seed took root,

But when, fulfilled by the prevenient Word,
Adam's first dream, the first dream of this tree,
Became, as that inscrutable darkness stirred,
First fruits of a new immortality.

Take now this apple and eat! That you may live,
Take death into your mouth and learn to die;
Till it know loss, no heart can learn to give,
Nor know truth till it prove it by a lie.

Before you bite, pause, listen, look around
This natural world of which you are a part,
Though Adam forget it as he breaks the ground,
You will keep always virgin in your heart.

The silence of creation before speech,
The naked animal hid in human dress,
These are your path to knowledge, past the reach
Of all that Adam by thought or skill may guess.

Painfully, step by step, his sons must learn;
Their Babel of words, their tower of science will grow:
For you and for your daughters, each in turn,
Only to eat this apple will be to know.

And this is why you must be first to eat,
To lose, to lie, to suffer, to give birth;
Your fall at once, in full, will be complete;
He, by slow toil must dig his from the earth.

And always in your arms he will be wild
With longing not centred in his love for you,
Passion with its own triumph unreconciled,
Betrayal and grief no pleasure can subdue.

Your nakedness will always be the dim
Image of this paradise as it was;

The act of love, within its joy, for him
Echo the re-enactment of its loss.

For you he will make history: One by one
Gods, civilizations, systems, law and art;
You will accept them all, be bound by none
Of all his stratagems to probe your heart.

For in your fruitful belly you must bear
His future worlds and in your heart his past,
Foreknowing the next he gropes towards, aware
Of what decreed the ruin of his last.

He is your means to change the universe;
You are his guest, the doubt his mind explores;
The knowledge of Good and Evil is his curse;
The knowledge of all that lies beyond is yours.

And for this cause you will exalt his power,
Yearning for what you know he cannot do;
Worship his otherness and in the hour
Of passion adore him when he turns to you,

Cry out: "Now take, possess me as a god;
Do with me what you will; think not of me;
Master me; crush me; break me with your rod;
Only if I am nothing shall I be free!"

O blessed among women, immortal Eve,
Take now this fruit of his mortality.
This is your body broken for his reprieve;
This is your sacrament; take, eat and die!

The Pleasure Of Princes

What pleasures have great princes? These: to know
Themselves reputed mad with pride or power;
To speak few words—few words and short bring low
This ancient house, that city with flame devour;

To make old men, their fathers' enemies,
Drunk on the vintage of the former age;
To have great painters show their mistresses
Naked to the succeeding time; engage

The cunning of able, treacherous ministers
To serve, despite themselves, the cause they hate,
And leave a prosperous kingdom to their heirs
Nursed by the caterpillars of the state;

To keep their spies in good men's hearts; to read
The malice of the wise, and act betimes;
To hear the Grand Remonstrances of greed,
Led by the pure; cheat justice of her crimes;

To beget worthless sons and, being old,
By starlight climb the battlements, and while
The pacing sentry hugs himself for cold,
Keep vigil like a lover, muse and smile,

And think, to see from the grim castle steep
The midnight city below rejoice and shine:
'There my great demon grumbles in his sleep
And dreams of his destruction, and of mine.'

A Visit To The Ruins

This charming archaeologist, with her spade,
Surveys my ruins, measures the daisied mound,
Three mouldering plinths, one column still erect.
Her twenty summers from its millennial shade
Take stock of all that history underground.
Cutting the first sods, what does she expect?

Has she some theory, or is she digging blind?
Does dream or sober fact impel her, while
She sinks a trial trench, pegs out her grid?
Is it foreknowledge of what she hopes to find
Moulds her young mouth to that archaic smile?
And when her spade rings on the marble lid,

The King's sarcophagus, all its seals intact,
Still smiling will she raise his golden mask,
Touch with warm lips that face of crumbling bone,
Or will its hollow sockets not refract
Tears dropping from live eyes again? I ask,
Will she disturb my quiet or her own?

Or, if she seeks inscriptions, to restore
From primitive script my long-lost Song of Songs,
Whose extant fragments baffle her scholar's art,
Has she the scholar's instinct, which before
She spells its words, by the true Gift of Tongues,
Can call their music already from her heart?

Thinking to reconstruct me as I was
In the great years before the Kingdom fell,
Can she imagine such arrogant splendour; can
Her notes from cinder, debris, sherds and dross
Bring to fierce life the tale these relics tell
Of those last moments when the sack began:

The throne-room wrecked, the roar of "kill and kill!",
The women raped and slaughtered where they lie,
The shattered images ravished of their gold,
And, whiter than his statue and as still,
The young King, dying in all that butchery,
Watching the hangings as the flames take hold?

Well, if she can! Some things her practised eye
Will miss: her sceptic mind will not observe
Ghosts slink to deeper layers among the dead;
She will not hear a skeleton's minimal sigh
Greet the sharp sun, nor, as she turns fresh turf,

The mandrake's shriek, torn bleeding from its bed.

No training could enable her to foresee
Her last discovery when it comes to pass:
The eponymous founder's tomb, identified,
Gapes as the granite slab is levered free;
She steps towards that black hole and sees, alas,
That there is nothing, nothing at all inside!

Nothing ... and then the darkness swirls and sighs
And, out of the illimitable past,
A voice of terror, speaking her own tongue,
Calls her by name, and calls again, and cries:
“At last you have come home, at last, at last!
Where have you been, child, why did you stay so long?”

Beware of Ruins

Beware of ruins: they have a treacherous charm;
Insidious echoes lurk among their stones;
That scummy pool was where the fountain soared;
The seated figure, whose white arm
Beckons you, is a mock-up of dry bones
And not, as you believe, your love restored.

The moonlight lends her grace, but have a care:
Behind her waits the fairy Melusine.
The sun those beams refract died years ago.
The moat has a romantic air
But it is choked with nettles and obscene
And phallic fungi rot there as they grow.

Beware of ruins; the heart is apt to make
Monstrous assumptions on the unburied past;
Though cleverly restored, the Tudor tower
Is spurious, the facade a fake
Whose new face is a death-mask of the last
Despairing effort before it all went sour.

There are ruins, too, of a less obvious kind;
I go back; cannot believe my eyes; the place
Is just as I recall: the fire is lit,
The table laid, bed warmed; I find
My former world intact, but not, alas,
The man I was when I was part of it.

The Wild Bees

Potnia, thesmophore, chrysanion. ...

Mistress of bees, guardian of rites and forms,
On a high bank by the prophetic stream
Which runs past Thespias down from Helikon,
A lad from Dog's Head, sleeping in the sun,
First saw her picking flowers in his dream
While the wild bees behind her wheeled in swarms.

A tall girl, tossing back her corn-gold hair,
She strode towards him through the grass knee-deep;
A meadow of Sicily, and reed-fringed pond
With a steep palisade of woods beyond,
Burned, glittered and wavered round him in his sleep.
She stood and held him with her violet stare

And said: "Why do you lie there, graceless boy?
Get up and worship me: I am a god."
But Pindar laughed and, rising on one knee,
Wound strong arms round her virgin thighs: "To me
You are just a girl, well-met beside the road;
To worship your body shall be my act of joy."

She smiled and said: "For a still beardless youth
You indeed show mettle; but you come too late
For love; and though henceforward you are mine,
We must meet in another place. The Nine
Have marked your manhood for a different fate."
She bent and kissed him lightly on the mouth,

Crying: "Golden reins! Remember what I say!"
Darkness. A roar. The earth shook. He awoke
To find his lips sealed with the waxen cells
Which wild bees swarming in the asphodels
Had moulded while he slept; and when he broke
That seal, he sang, and singing, went his way.

That was the first of all his songs. He went
Towards Hippocrene and did not look behind
Nor saw, seated among the ancient trees,
A black-veiled form, her hands upon her knees,
Who, standing, seemed taller than womenkind,
Nor earth absorb her, as her element.

Boys forget dreams, and Pindar, it is said,
Forgot Persephone. But he became
The glory of Greece; cities and men and gods

He made immortal in still living odes.
Yet, when he was old and full of years and fame,
She came one night and stood beside his bed.

She stood unveiled in her full majesty:
“I made you a poet, Pindar,” she began,
“All other gods you honour, but me you wrong;
You have never written me a single song
—A graceless boy and an ungrateful man—
Yet you shall make one when you come to me.”

She vanished and, if Pausanias' tale is true,
The tenth day afterwards the poet died.
An aged kinswoman of his, whose art
Had been to learn all Pindar's songs by heart,
Woke in the night to find him at her side,
Saying: “Learn this paean which I shall sing to you!”

Then the dead man opened his mouth and sang
The chariot of Dis, the golden reins,
The virgin goddess ravished underground
And her divinity with amaranth crowned.
The door-frames rattled at the dreadful strains
And the whole house with triumph and terror rang.

He sang that Delphic priestess called the Bee
Who had made him partner in Apollo's share;
He sang dead heroes in their beehive tombs;
He sang the tasting of the honeycombs
Which the wild bees in their dark caves prepare,
The food of those the Muses hold in fee,

And the old woman sang it back again
To bare walls, for the poet's shade had fled;
And next she rose and wrote it word for word.
This was the very paean Pausanias heard
In Thebes, with Pindar then six centuries dead;
And even today three words of it remain.

Goddess of the wild bees, renewer of rites,
I have this curious story much in mind.
I too am old, I too have practised verse
The ancient superstitions I rehearse
Stir intuitions, though of another kind,
Such as I feel when visiting those sites.

Do other beings inhabit our biosphere
Whose life is one and whole? I cannot tell.
I only know at moments everywhere
I sense their presences in earth and air,
Mountain and cave, river and sacred well.

Pausanias has been dead this many a year;

I too must die—nor would I be reborn,
But offer my death to quicken other lives,
Trusting, if in my turn I bring my song,
Deep underground my shade may taste that strong,
Black honey from which alone our art revives,
And share its resurrection with the corn.

Hay Fever

Time, with his scythe honed fine,
Takes a pace forward, swings from the hips; the flesh
Crumples and falls in wind-rows curving away.
Waiting my turn as he swings—(Not yet, not mine!)
I recall the sound of the scythe on an earlier day:
Late spring in my boyhood; learning to mow with the men;
Eight of us moving together in echelon line,
Out of the lucerne patch and into the hay,
And I at the end on the left because I was fresh,
Because I was new to the game and young at the skill—
As though I were Time himself, I remember it still.

The mild Tasmanian summer; the men are here
To mow for my minister father and make his hay.
They have brought a scythe for me. I hold it with pride.
The lucerne is up to my knee, the grass to my waist.
I set the blade into the grass as they taught me the way;
The still dewy stalks nod, tremble and tilt aside,
Cornflowers, lucerne and poppies, sugar-grass, summer-grass, laced
With red-stemmed dock; I feel the thin steel crunch
Through hollow-stalk milk thistle, self-sown oats and rye;
I snag on a fat-hen clump; chick-weed falls in a bunch,
But sorrel scatters; dandelion casts up a golden eye,
To a smell of cows chewing their cuds, the sweet hay-breath:
The boy with the scythe never thinks it the smell of death.

The boy with the scythe takes a stride forward, swings
From the hips, keeping place and pace, keeping time
By the sound of the scythes, by the swish and ripple, the sigh
Of the dying grass like an animal breathing, a rhyme
Falling pat on the ear that matches the steel as it sings
True through the tottering stems. Sweat runs into my eye.
How long to a break? How long can I hold out yet?
I nerve my arms to go on; I am running with, flooding with, sweat.

How long ago was it?—Why, the scythe is as obsolete now
As arrows and bow. I have lived from one age to another;
And I have made hay while I could and the sun still shone.
Time drives a harvester now: he does not depend on the weather.
Well, I have rolled in his hay, in my day, and now it is gone;
But I still have a barn stacked high with that good dry mow,
Shrivelled and fragrant stems, the grass and the flowers together
And a thistle or two in the pile for the prick of remorse.
It is good for a man when he comes to the end of his course
In the barn of his brain to be able to romp like a boy in the heap ...
To lie still in well-cured hay ... to drift into sleep.

Circe

after the painting by Dosso Dossi

Behind her not the quivering of a leaf
Flutters the deep enchantment of the wood;
No ripple at her feet disturbs the well;
She sits among her lovers dazed with grief,
Bewildered by the charge of alien blood.
Herself transfigured by the hideous spell

She sits among her creatures motionless,
Sees the last human shadow of despair
Fade from the sad, inquisitive, animal eyes,
The naked body of the sorceress
Mocked by the light, sleek shapes of feather and hair.
And as on snout and beak and muzzle dies

The melancholy trace of human speech,
For the first time her heart is rich with words
And with her voice she disenchant the grove.
The lonely island and the sounding beach
Answer with barks and howls, the scream of birds,
Her uncontrollable, aching cry of love.

The Sacred Way

I wake in the night. I turn and think of the age.
What image has it of man; what roots for the mind?
What names now does imagination find
To fix our heritage?

The world I grew up in now belongs to the past;
Round my cradle, behind my pillow there stood
Hercules, Samson, Roland, Robin Hood,
To say: Stand firm, stand fast!

My unripe soul, groping to fill its need,
Found in those legends a food by which it grew.
Whatever we learned, the heroes were what we *knew*.
We were fortunate indeed.

We have lost that world. How shall my son go on
To form his archetypal image of man?
Frankenstein? Faust? Dracula? Don Juan?
O Absalom, my son!

Persons from Porlock

On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock. ...

PREFATORY NOTE TO *Kubla Khan*

It was unfortunate: Poor S.T.C.!
Once in his life, once only among men,
Once in the process of Eternity,
It happened, and it will not happen again:
His dream unbidden took shape as poetry,
And waking, he recalled it, and his pen
Set down the magic lines—then came the dread
Summons from Porlock and the vision fled.

Fortunate Coleridge! He at least began.
Porlock was tardy, almost missed its cue;
Something at least was saved of *Kubla Khan*,
And Porlock's agent, give the man his due,
Paid him that single visit in the span
Of a long life of three score years and two.
The Ancient Mariner, it is fair to mention,
Escaped the Person's sinister attention.

The Swan of Porlock is a kind of duck;
It quacks and has a large, absurd behind—
Yes, on the whole, the poet was in luck.
Think of his fate had Porlock been less kind;
The paps of Porlock might have given him suck;
Teachers from Porlock organized his mind,
And Porlock's Muse inspired the vapid strain
Of: "Porlock, Loveliest Village of the Plain!"

And had his baffled genius stood the test,
With that one vision which is death to hide
Burning for utterance in the poet's breast,
Porlock might still be trusted to provide
Neighbours from Porlock, culled from Porlock's best,
The sweetest girl in Porlock for his bride,
In due course to surround him with some young
Persons from Porlock, always giving tongue.

Eight hours a day of honest Porlock toil,
And Porlock parties—useless to refuse—
The ritual gardening of Porlock soil,
Would leave him time still for a spare-time Muse—
And when with conscience murdered, wits aboil,

He shook the dust of Porlock from his shoes,
Some would be apt to blame him, some to scoff,
But others kindly come to see him off.

Porlock was gone: the marvellous dream was there.
“In Xanadu ...”—He knew the words by rote,
Had but to set them down.
To his despair
He found a man from Porlock wore his coat,
And thought his thoughts; and, stolid in his chair,
A person fresh from Porlock sat and wrote:
“Amid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Voices of Porlock babbling round the bar.”

Sonnets to Baudelaire

For Norman Holmes Pearson

I

These thoughts which I return you are your due
Not so much that in origin most were yours,
As that of all those spirits who know what laws
Forge Irony to Beauty, it was you
Drank deepest of that pure sardonic draught;
You, naked, the first gardener under God,
Who tilled our rotting paradise, from its sod
Raised monstrous blooms and taught my tongue the craft.

For we are fellow travellers in a land
Where few around us know they walk in hell,
Where what they take for the creating Word
Is a blind wind sowing the sand with sand.
Brother, it is our task of love to tell
Men they are damned, and damned in being absurd.

II

Well, to begin, here's a nice tit for tat:
I like your note to old Pharaoh, Monselet,
How, from unspeakable Brussels, on your way
To Uccle—unpronounceable at that!—
You found yourself, on Belgium's dreary flat,
In a pub with a signboard, so you say:
"A la Vue du Cimitière, Estaminet!"
You've had your innings: It's my turn to bat!

In Lisbon, two years since, I took a tram
"Cimiterio dos Prazeres" read its sign!
I thought of possible meanings all day, all
By-blows of Nature, who does not give a damn.
But, also in Lisbon she gave me her divine
Banco Espirito Santo e Commercial!

III

A Man of Letters, Hippolyte Babou,
—God help us, but there's *something* in a name!—
A Man of Taste, a Critic of some fame,
Misread your *Fleurs du Mal* but praised them too.
And J.-J. Weiss—alas, he never knew
B from a bull's foot—called them trite and tame,
Inspid and obscene. It seems a shame
Time should leave both to welter in the pooh!

But ah, to see great ruining Time set back

These self-appointed police of taste and style,
The pompous claims, the hollow judgments crack,
Ridicule shrivel that smug olympian calm,
Brings poets when we meet, once in a while,
What belly-laughs, what recompense, what balm!

IV

He warms my heart, your Monsieur Monselet;
—Such culture addicts, such genteel amateurs
As scold us for “abominable verse”,
While, savage with joy, we let them have their say—

Poor fellow, I see him scan your lines, his eyes
Moist with fine feeling, till they meet the words
About the hanged man's belly ripped by birds:
“His dangling bowels dribbled down his thighs!”

“Ah, monstrous line!” You smile and shake your head:
“Monstrous, and perfect! What else could I do?
A poem is not a game; the image I chose
Was what my theme required. But what would you
—Put yourself in my place—have wished instead?”
And Monsieur Monselet replies: “A Rose!”

V

Here's News from Muscovy to delight us both:
Aseev, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky and Co,
Those Futurists half a century ago
Cutting new coats regardless of their cloth.
“Throw Pushkin overboard,” I quote them straight,
“From the great steamship of Modernity!
Cast Tolstoy, Dostoevsky to the sea!”
In nineteen twelve that sounded up-to-date.

They were poets, and not such bad ones. We may laugh
And say the Future was not theirs to read
And yet their image was exquisitely just,
Such emblems as become an epitaph:
That steamship, obsolete as the Futurist creed,
This heap of scrap; their sea, that bowl of dust.

VI

Having left Pushkin bleeding on the snow
George D'Anthès, dapper instrument of doom,
Sleek as a seal, purring like any tom,
Went back to France. Blood was his passport to
A railway fortune, a bank, a mission or so;
Three emperors rewarded his aplomb;
He had, to crown it all at last, become
President of the Paris Gaslight Co.

Did you rejoice to know, since now and then
Nature achieves what Art would hardly dare,
At nightfall, as you watched crepuscular
Demons swarm to work like business men,
Your wicked city, your Paris, *la ville lumière*,
Lit by the man who quenched the morning star?

VII

Why women should outlive men, the wits aver,
Is that the hazards that confront the human
Give men one more to face than women: Woman!
She is the earth: he digs his grave in her,
The insatiate sea that drowns the tallest mast,
The gorgon sky that stares his dreams to stone,
The mould that quietly eats him to the bone,
The long, long night in which he sleeps at last.

Was it your luck or genius to discover
That living is this voyage among the dead,
That poets have one task: to tell the brave
How all his victories must be lost in bed
And in the womb say to each unborn lover:
The hand that rocks the cradle rules the grave.

VIII

That was one view of Woman I cannot share.
The wound was self-inflicted, I recall,
You suffered, but was there any need at all
For all that martyrdom, horror and despair?
I think you did not fool yourself. You knew
Woman was your laboratory; your delight,
Stretched by that frightful female in the night,
Was a pure scientist's pleasure in the New.

Much worse of course, than your grand tour of Hell,
Are the ideals, the sisters of your choice,
Statues in sugar on their pedestals,
Your hymns *à l'ange*, *à l'idole immortelle*!
Thank God at times you heard the deep that calls
To the great deep, Love's unmistakable voice.

IX

The voyage we do not take to the unknown
Becomes the poem that visits us instead;
Its metaphor: two lovers in a bed
Lost to the flesh, exploring towards the bone.
Though one is underneath and one above,
They are one body, one motion and one breath,
Where each caress becomes an act of faith
And every simile an act of love.

Here you struck truth; here you divined a need
In every man, in every woman too
To bare the bone of their necessity,
Give all, hold nothing back, to break, to bleed.
Isolde does the thing she has to do
And drinks and casts the cup into the sea.

X

You saw it rise, I see it set, that sun,
The bright aubade, the serenade's dying fall,
Between us, brother, we have seen it all.
What was it worth, now all is said and done,
The great Romantic theme: *My heart laid bare?*
One thing, like Ozymandias, they forgot:
To make it worth the trouble, someone must care

To watch Narcissus give himself a hug
Or Onan practise on his magic flute.
Now as the stars light up, for better or worse
Time throws away the key that locked those smug
Museums of self-regard, the universe
Expands, but something's slimy underfoot.

XI

Your ancient, unknown author asks: What can
Match that man's joy who drinks the man-made wine,
Except a deeper ecstasy, the divine
Joy of the wine to feel itself made man?
Thus poets see Nature's temple, less a place
Of living pillars where all things correspond,
Than one where each world knows a world beyond
And all things yearn for that supreme embrace.

All things solicit the poet for his art
To change dumb being into sentient wine;
Flowers turn their faces, stones implore his feet.
Drunk with those lives, he reels towards the sign
Where, in his turn, the secular paraclete
Cries: Drink, engulf me, let me feel my heart.

XII

Crénom! your last word, as it could be mine,
(It shocked those pious sisters in the ward)
Speech, Poetry, the Holy Name, the Word,
Became a grunt, last human act and sign.
What of it? The butt-end of a harmless oath
Showed, like the glint of your still living eyes,
Not Life, not Death had taken you by surprise:
With love and irony you met them both.

Women you had loved stood smiling by your bed;

Crénom! you sighed: it was the last caress.
They played you Wagner and again a blurred
Crénom! came like an echo from the Dead.
Crénom! Name, number, the creating word
Utters the heart's unhesitating: Yes!

The Damnation of Byron

When the great hero, adding to the charms
of genius and his scandals, left the light
stamped with the irresistible trade of arms,
the Hell of Women received him as their right.

Through the Infernal Fields he makes his way
playing again, but on a giant stage,
his own Don Juan; pursuing day by day
Childe Harold's last astonishing pilgrimage.

It is the landscape of erotic dreams:
the dim, brown plains, the country without air
or tenderness of trees by hidden streams,
but cactus or euphorbia here and there

thrusts up its monstrous phallus at the sky.
And moving against this silvered, lustrous green
like a pink larva over the whole dry
savannah of hell, the bodies of women are seen.

And at his coming all their beauties stir
mysterious, like the freshening of a rose
as, the incomparable connoisseur,
pale and serene across their world he goes,

always there rises glowing in his path,
superb and sensual, in the light that pours
a tarnished glory on the soil of death,
this leafless nakedness of tropic flowers;

the female body's impersonal charm, the curves
of a young head poised on its gracious stalk.
The idiom of her gesture he observes,
that tender dislocation of her walk.

Held in his brain's deep lupanar they float,
the tapering trunk, the pure vase of the hips,
the breasts, the breasts to which the hands go out
instinctive, the adoring finger-tips,

the thighs incurved, the skin misted with light,
the mouth repeating its own rich circumflex...
At first he moves and breathes in his delight
drowned in the brute somnambulism of sex.

He is a kind of symbol of the male:
as a great bull, stiffly, deliberately

crosses his paddock, lashing his brutal tail,
the sullen engine of fecundity,

so, in his first youth and his first desire,
his air of pride and the immortal bloom,
once more he sets the feminine world on fire,
passing in his romantic blaze of gloom.

Prodigious vigour flowers new in him:
each morning nerves him with heroic lust.
His thoughts are women, he breathes, is clothed with them,
he sinks on something female in the dust.

He has them all, all the menagerie
of race, the subtle stimulus of shapes:
Negresses in their first nubility
with the sad eyes and muzzles of young apes,

vast Scandinavian divinities
superbly modelled, for all their cowl-like air,
the pale bread of their bellies magnificent rise
from the blond triangle of pubic hair,

and slender girls with delicate golden shanks
and elongated skulls from lost Peru...
and sensual emphasis of the Spaniard's flanks,
and the callipygous haunches of the Jew...

Dancers and whores, blue-stockings, countesses,
types of La Fornarina and Caroline Lamb,
all the seductions of all mistresses,
the savage, the sentimental and the sham...

And yet he is alone. At first he feels
nothing above the tumult of his blood,
while through his veins like the slow pox there steals
the deep significance of his solitude.

And from this feeling without haste or pause
vengeance predestined sharpens, bit by bit;
as lust its anaesthesia withdraws
the force of his damnation grows from it.

Grows as the mind wakes, and inexorably
the critic, the thinker, the invincible
intelligence at last detached and free
wakes, and he knows...he knows he is in hell.

And there begins in him that horrible thing,
clairvoyance, the cruel nightmare of escape:
He seeks companions: but they only bring

wet kisses and voluptuous legs agape...

He longs for the companionship of men,
their sexless friendliness. He cannot live
'like the gods in Lucretius once again'
nor ever in woman's wit and charm forgive

the taint of the pervading feminine.
Yet always to this nausea he returns
from his own mind—the emptiness within
of the professional lover. As he learns

how even his own society has become
a horror, a loneliness he cannot bear,
the last stage of Don Juan's martyrdom,
the last supreme resources of despair

appear, and brutally lucid he descends
simply to treat them as The Enemy.
His lust becomes revenge, his ardour lends
insatiable pleasure to his insanity.

As he exhausts himself in the delights
of torture, gourmandising in their pain,
hate eats his features out: it seethes and bites
like a slow acid. It destroys his brain.

Yet this resource betrays him, even this,
for like tormented demons, they adore
their torment. They revere like savages
the god's ferocity with lascivious awe.

Until, neurotic, hounded by strange fears,
at last his journey changes to a flight.
Delirious, broken, fugitive, he hears
marching and countermarching in the night,

the panic of vague terrors closing in:
whichever way he turns he hears them come.
Far off immeasurable steps begin,
far off the ominous mumble of a drum,

and from the bounds of that dim listening land
approaches with her grave incessant tread
the Eternal Goddess in whose placid hand
are all the happy and all the rebellious dead.

Before her now he stands and makes his prayer
for that oblivion of the Second Death ...
when suddenly those majestic breasts all bare
riding the tranquil motion of her breath

reveal the body of her divinity:
the torso spread marmoreal, his eyes
downwards uncover its mighty line and see
darkness dividing those prodigious thighs.

There as he stares, slowly she smiles at him...
And the great hero, mad with the terrible
madness of souls, turns fleeing, while the dim
plains heave with the immense derision of Hell.

The Loves of Ophrys and Andrenus

Where Simulations studied smile ensnares.
Anna Seward

I
Lichfield, from whose unlikely bosom came
So large a brood of Genius and Fame,
Drew others to their circle more than most
Centres of learning in that age could boast;
Where genius will break out no man can say,
And who would pick on Lichfield anyway?
Yet this unpromising Cathedral town
Fostered so many persons of renown
As changed the civilization of the West.
Such names as Darwin, Priestly, Watt attest,
Like Garrick, Wedgwood, Johnson in the arts,
That these were leading spirits and men of parts;
And, shadowed by the Ladies of the Vale,
Most gifted was the hero of my tale,
Darwin, that most extraordinary man,
Whose genius in so many channels ran,
Physician, chemist, poet, engineer,
Lover and naturalist, that this career
Seemed to denote a universal mind
Where all those varied talents were combined.
But, not to over-rate him, he was not
A technical inventor like James Watt,
A theorist to match his grandson who
Drove mankind out of Eden to the zoo,
A mediocre poet. Byron's sneer
Though cruel, one must admit, was not unfair,
Writing of "flimsy Darwin's pompous chime,
That mighty master of unmeaning rhyme."
As for the lover, he was no Juan
But Cupid in the hide of Caliban.
"His figure vast and massive and his head,"
As waspish Mrs Schimmelpenninck said,
"Near buried in his shoulders, and on this big,
Gross body a ridiculous scratch wig."
And yet, though no Adonis, he contrived
Throughout life to be mistressed and wived
And loved and universally admired
(‘Erasmus’ means ‘beloved’ or ‘desired’).
The head and front of this adoring train
And one who worshipped but, alas, in vain,
Was Anna Seward hailed by all report
As Swan of Lichfield where she held her court.
The peerless Swan, (though not to be unkind,

Love tempers laughter when she comes to mind)
Wrote copious verses almost from the first
And, though Papa, the Canon, frowned she nursed
A life-long dedication to the Muse.
Attested by contemporary reviews,
She had some reputation in her day
Which time has not supported, sad to say,
The literary vices of her time
She had absorbed: the Abstract, the Sublime,
The sentimental commonplace, the grace
Of 'feathered tribe' for birds and 'finny race'
For 'fish', sententious, moralizing, flat
And virtuously superior at that,
'Poetess' in full meaning of the word:
Vapid, genteel, provincial and absurd;
Although few readers would prefer, god knows,
The unrelenting eloquence of her prose.
She ran a coterie, collected lace,
And showed to female writers just a trace
Of the queen-bee who will not leave alive
A single rival to her in the hive,
Something of that inexorable hate
Nursed towards the abysmal by the second-rate.
And yet she had, I own in her defence,
A loving nature and shrewd common sense.
Though she made foes, she found of friends no lack
Who loved yet laughed at her behind her back;
And though they praised her, praise sincerely meant,
As though in one encomium to present
Venus, the Graces and the Muse combined,
The truth is otherwise. I have in mind
Her portrait as it shows her in her prime
By one of the first artists of the time,
Painted by Tilly Kettle for whom she sat,
Aged nineteen years, horse-faced and rather fat.
For Cupid's shafts, though she was out of luck,
The Swan of Lichfield was a sitting duck.
Alas, as she admitted from the start,
Nature had not equipped her for the part.
But Dr Darwin won her virgin heart.
When he appeared upon the Lichfield scene,
He was just twenty-five and she thirteen.
He supervised her studies, praised her verse
And told her father his was 'rather worse'.
(The Canon, it appears, had tried to ban
His daughter's poems. Darwin scotched his plan)
Till Anna burgeoned and surpassed papa—
What wonder if she loved him from afar!
Afar indeed; he was a married man.
Picture her agitation, if you can,
When some years later, his first wife having died,

The gates of expectation opened wide.
Unhappy Anna, her tardy swain instead
Took an attractive mistress to his bed
And, to make matters worse, till they were grown,
Brought up his bastard children with his own.
But worse still followed: The mistress pensioned off,
The doctor suffered a bad case of love;
With almost fifty winters at his back,
He took no medicine for his attack,
Broke out in feverish verse at every pore
And made his passion public, what is more.
Her husband, meantime, had discreetly died
And Darwin won the lady for his bride.
For Anna, nearly forty and unwed
This could have been the final blow, instead
She rallied, praised his poems and his designs;
But in a fictive poem she penned these lines
In which her heroine spurned, gives word for word,
Her own said case of love and hope deferred.

*“Three wretched weeks my throbbing bosom hears
The wounding conflict of its various fears,
While Rumour's voice inflames my grief and pride
And gives Eugenio to a wealthier bride.
My trembling hands, the sick suspense to ease,
From day to day the public records seize;
While glances, rapid as the meteor's ray,
Eager amid the crowded columns stray;
Snatch at sad certainty from busy fame,
Yet dread to meet my dear Eugenio's name.
Now glooms on the stained page the barbarous truth
And blights each blooming promise of my youth!
Eugenio married!—Anguish and despair
In every pompous killing letter glare.”*

Poor Anna, in these high-flown lines I feel,
The words are artificial, the pain is real;
And, while I would not overstate the case,
She showed both courage, dignity and grace,
Admired his talents, praised them to the end
And, having resigned herself, remained his friend.

So much in fact, or based on fact; the rest
Is fiction, or a mere surmise at best.
Darwin the naturalist, about the year
Of his infatuation mentioned here,
Began a vast botanical romance,
A poem on the sexual lives of plants,
A floral *Kama Sutra*, just as full
Of text-book detail, but not quite as dull
As that pedantic catalogue. It may be

Because he had some gift for poetry
And had a saving sense of fun, and wit,
The doctor almost gets away with it.
Its charm, I think, absurd as it may seem,
Is that it puts the whole Linnean scheme
Of vegetable classes more or less
In amorous language and in pastoral dress.
In pastoral terms the floral goings on
Become so gross that Lichfield's modest Swan
Could well have balked. She hailed it as sublime
And prophesied that it would outlast time.
Alas for prophets! it did not outlast
Even eighteenth century principles of taste.
But I, who like them, have long had in view
To see if I could write a pastoral too
Full of that elegant diction and sublime
Inanity which Sam Johnson at the time
Denounced with rotund, magisterial rage,
But I enjoy as emblems of the age.
And greatly daring I have fathered it
On Anna Seward's Muse, though I admit
I could not hope to rise to heights like hers
Or match the genteel elegance of her verse.
All I have ventured in my own crude way
Is in the period's common coin, to pay
A debt to nature and a debt to art,
Imagining Anna, with her broken heart,
Writing a pastoral fable such as mine
Based on Linnean system and design,
The fable of the orchid and the bee
Which always has, I own, enchanted me
Where nature in her most fantastic mood
Contrives a blossom by an insect wooed.
Darwin records the facts but gets them wrong,
She sets him right; but there's an undersong,
A second fable beneath the first to stress
In pastoral terms the depth of her distress.

II

In the warm south, in whose propitious clime
The rose grows wild as rival to the thyme,
Year after year a metamorphosis
Recurr which Ovid might have claimed for his.
The facts of nature it records are true
If little known; the legend, though is new.
As for the moral, let him who will, discern,
Which some may profit by and all may learn.

Deaf to the gay allurements of the spring,
Its mating birds and insects on the wing,
Andrenus, an unhappy shepherd swain

Sits mourning for his love, but mourns in vain.
She, who from birth had been his promised bride
And bloomed and burgeoned lovely at his side,
Sharing his childish sports without pretence,
And mingling fellowship with innocence,
Shyly, with new desire embraced and kissed,
Till full consent obtained their amorous tryst,
—For ancient custom of their race decreed
That spousals sanctioned ratified the deed—
When ripening years fulfilled her nubile charms
Denied herself to his enraptured arms.
Whether her parents broke the plighted troth,
Or she herself had found new love, or both,
Or sudden sickness caused her to delay,
Or unforeseen disaster blocked the way
He could not tell, but knew ('twas all he knew).
His passion thwarted and his love untrue.
Prostrate, hollow of cheek and dull of eye,
His locks unkempt, his tuneful pipe laid by,
Forlorn, bereft, unmindful of his sheep,
What can he do but wring his hands and weep?

On the bare earth, where in despair he lies,
Ophrys, a sorceress, his grief espies;
Ophrys, who for Andrenus from the first
Had long an unrequited passion nursed.
Working by secret spells, she had in vain
Attempted to seduce the constant swain,
But had by subtler spells procured at last
A frozen sleep upon his love to cast.
Now while the nymph lies torpid on her bed,
The witch plans to enchant him in her stead
And, seeing him prone and guessing why he weeps,
By stealth through bent and briar and bush she creeps,
And closely stands unseen, agog to know
From his wild words the sources of his woe,
His expectations dashed, his loss confessed,
And desperate passion raging in his breast.

Not long she listens. Prompt to quit the spot,
She flies exultant to her gloomy grot,
Where herbs and simples from the walls are snatched
And unguents from their brass-bound chests unlatched.
Then next she strips her beauties to the skin,
Anoints herself, while muttered spells begin
A mystic change until, transmogrified
She stands before her glass, Andrenus' bride.
Slowly she turns, surveying all her charms,
Andrena's eyes, her hair, her breasts, her arms,
Andrena to the life! her voice, her smile
Her winning mien and glance devoid of guile,

Andrena all without in every part,
But not within, where beats false Ophrys' heart.

That heart exulting, to the grove she flies
Where in his misery the shepherd lies
And, as she runs, she calls with well-feigned art:
“Andrenus, where art thou, my love, my heart?
Thine own Andrena, come at last, though late,
Shall share thy dear embrace, thy life, thy fate!”

He hears, he starts, he rises from the ground
And turns enraptured to the welcome sound.
Through brake and bush by force he makes his way,
Towards her voice; then makes a sudden stay.
There, as his eyes recall her last, she stands
And stretches to her love imploring hands.
But what is this?—(A false step of the witch)—
She stands before him bare, without a stitch!
Can this indeed be she, his modest bride?
Can virgin shame so soon be set aside?
Say, can his eyes deceive him? Yes, they do.
Crying, “Andrena, is it really you?”
He stands uncertain, sensing in the change
Something unnatural, something false and strange.
The wily sorceress, swift to make amends,
Now turns her error to promote her ends.
“My love, my life, say, what is this I see?
Are these the nuptials prepared for me?
It was foretold that, being already wed,
Nature herself should bring the bride to bed,
And here she bade me to expect my lord,
Fragrant and fervent on this flowery sward.
What do I find? An eager, radiant groom,
Thewed with youth's pith and graced with manhood's
bloom?
Where are the wreaths, the festal songs, the flame
That lights to love's fulfilment? Ah, for shame!
Neglected, ragged, sordid, as you stand,
No bridegroom surely, but a man unmanned!”

At this the swain abashed, as well he might,
Trembling with love and dazzled with her sight,
In fear of loss, hearing such word as these,
Sinks down and sues for pardon on his knees.
The sorceress smiled and drew him to his feet:
“How can I chide the very hour we meet?
My own Andrenus and my only love
And hope deferred, what am I thinking of?
Set ceremony's needless pomps aside;
Let nature sponsor and be love our guide!
Do off these ragged weeds, cease all alarms,

And come, sweet love, into my longing arms!”

Andrenus straightway all his doubts forsook;
In fervent clasp the specious maid he took.
She, no less willing, lays her on the sword
Which swells to meet her of its own accord.
His shepherd's clouts in haste he flings aside
And flies incontinent to meet his bride.
Now is their consummation within reach.
Alas, the fatal gift of human speech,
Once uttered, ever useless to retract,
Destroys the spell, betrays him in the act.
Her triumph vanishes beyond recall;
His sweets, in prospect cherished, change to gall.
Scarce in their mutual embrace joined fast,
She sighs and whispers, “Ah, my love, at last!”
And he no less enraptured breathes, “Dear Heart,
Broke are the chains that kept us long apart.
None have I loved but thee, nor every could
For when I thought thee lost, another stood
To win my love; false Ophrys, whom I loathe,
Wooed me incessantly and would unclothe
Her unregarded beauties to my view
—Beauties indeed, though unregarded too—
In open field or else in secret grove,
Hoping to win me from my faithful love.
But now at last, such figments to destroy,
My only, own Andrena I enjoy.”
The false Andrena, seeing her love still spurned,
With jealous rage and vengeful malice burned.
“Shall I,” she thinks, “my own undoing be?
Promote his love for her he thinks is me,
Only, when he is undeceived, to wait
For his rejection and redoubled hate?
Perish the thought! I shall re-weave the spell,
Revenge his settled spite, and triumph as well!”

The spell re-cast, she folds him to her breast.
Alas, he finds, though eager in the quest,
The gates of love are locked. The hapless swain
Strives for fulfilment but he strives in vain.
Nightmare ensues: the cheating vision flies;
Alone, frustrated in the grove he lies;
And, worst of all, now beckoning from the trees,
Andrena naked twenty-fold he sees.
Each way he flies, as all her shapes dislimn,
The mocking voice of Ophrys follows him.

There to his gods Andrenus makes his prayer
To be translated into earth or air.
The gods in pity, mindful of his plea,

Transform him to a solitary bee,
His tardy love, Andrena to the same
And Ophrys to the flower that bears her name.
Yearly their tale, with each returning spring,
They re-enact: Andrenus on the wing,
Before Andrena hatches, finds instead
The orchid Ophrys with her blooms out-spread,
Offering on every hillside, field and grove
A perfect simulacrum of his love.
He flies, he clasps, he strives in vain to mate,
Flies to another and repeats his fate.
While cunning Ophrys laughs, he spreads the dust
Of pollen and so consummates her lust.
But when her errands are done, the gods are kind,
Pity his love, since love they know is blind.
Once real Andrena hatches from her nest
He clasps at last his true-love to his breast.
Let him, who sang the Loves of Plants so well,
Accept these verses and the tale they tell:
The message it enfolds, too, let him heed,
Since love's gloss even he who runs may read.

III

Erasmus, if he read her tale, at best
Was patronizing, kind but unimpressed.
My tale is done. I gaze into a fog
Where most plans go awry and dog eats dog,
Where massive talent and relentless will
Sometimes win through, but chance prevails, until
It seems the best and worst of human kind
Are those who plump for luck and travel blind.
Erasmus achieved little and lives today
Only for labours that prepared the way,
A prophet destined to be left behind,
A poet to whom his Muses proved unkind,
While Anna as midnight chimed from Custom's clock
Turned from a prodigy to a laughing-stock.
We see them as they were, but cannot tell,
If Fortune failed them or their gifts as well
But in full measure each of them possessed
What in their century was counted best
And most contributes to immediate good:
Good Humour, common-sense and fortitude,
Augustan virtues on which all depend
In every age and need most in the end.

Anna enjoyed her day and her renown
And sensibly, since Darwin let her down,
Had the last word, as women often do,
And her revenge, a mild one it is true;
For, having out-lived him by six years or more,

She took her pen and evened up the score;
Thwarted in her ambition to be his wife,
She turned biographer and wrote his life.

Ode on the Death of Pius the Twelfth

To every season its proper act of joy,
To every age its natural mode of grace,
Each vision its hour, each talent we employ
Its destined time and place.

I was at Amherst when this great pope died;
The northern year was wearing towards the cold;
The ancient trees were in their autumn pride
Of russet, flame and gold.

Amherst in Massachusetts in the Fall:
I ranged the college campus to admire
Maple and beech, poplar and ash in all
Their panoply of fire.

Something that since a child I longed to see,
This miracle of the other hemisphere:
Whole forests in their annual ecstasy
Waked by the dying year.

Not budding Spring, not Summer's green parade
Clothed in such glory these resplendent trees;
The lilies of the field were not arrayed
In riches such as these.

Nature evolves their colours as a call,
A lure which serves to fertilize the seed;
How strange then that the splendour of the Fall
Should serve no natural need

And, having no end in nature, yet can yield
Such exquisite natural pleasure to the eye!
Who could have guessed in summer's green concealed
The leaf's resolve to die?

Yet from the first spring shoots through all the year,
Masked in the chlorophyll's intenser green,
The feast of crimson was already there,
These yellows blazed unseen.

Now in the bright October sun the clear
Translucent colours trembled overhead
And as I walked, a voice I chanced to hear
Announced: The Pope is dead!

A human voice, yet there the place became
Bethel: each bough with pentecost was crowned;

The great trunks rapt in unconsuming flame
Stood as on holy ground.

I thought of this old man whose life was past,
Who in himself and his great office stood
Against the secular tempest as a vast
Oak spans the underwood;

Who in the age of Armageddon found
A voice that caused all men to hear it plain,
The blood of Abel crying from the ground
To stay the hand of Cain;

Who found from that great task small time to spare:
—For him and for mankind the hour was late—
So much to snatch, to save, so much to bear
That Mary's part must wait,

Until in his last years the change began:
A strange illumination of the heart,
Voices and visions such as mark the man
Chosen and set apart.

His death, they said, was slow, grotesque and hard,
Yet in that gross decay, until the end
Untroubled in his joy, he saw the Word
Made spirit and ascend.

Those glorious woods and that triumphant death
Prompted me there to join their mysteries:
This Brother Albert, this great oak of faith,
Those fire-enchanted trees.

Seven years have passed, and still, at times, I ask
Whether in man, as in those plants, may be
A splendour, which his human virtues mask,
Not given to us to see?

If to some lives at least there comes a stage
When, all the active man now left behind,
They enter on the treasure of old age,
This autumn of the mind.

Then, while the heart stands still, beyond desire
The dying animal knows a strange serene:
Emerging in its ecstasy of fire
The burning soul is seen.

Who sees it? Since old age appears to men
Senility, decrepitude, disease,
What Spirit walks among us, past our ken,

As we among these trees,

Whose unknown nature, blessed with keener sense
Catches its breath in wonder at the sight
And feels its being flood with that immense
Epiphany of light?

Moschus Moschiferus

A Song for St Cecilia's Day

In the high jungle where Assam meets Tibet
The small Kastura, most archaic of deer,
Were driven in herds to cram the hunters' net
And slaughtered for the musk-pods which they bear;

But in those thickets of rhododendron and birch
The tiny creatures now grow hard to find.
Fewer and fewer survive each year. The search
Employs new means, more exquisite and refined:

The hunters now set out by two or three;
Each carries a bow and one a slender flute.
Deep in the forest the archers choose a tree
And climb; the piper squats against the root.

And there they wait until all trace of man
And rumour of his passage dies away.
They melt into the leaves and, while they scan
The glade below, their comrade starts to play.

Through those vast listening woods a tremulous skein
Of melody wavers, delicate and shrill:
Now dancing and now pensive, now a rain
Of pure, bright drops of sound and now the still,

Sad wailing of lament; from tune to tune
It winds and modulates without a pause;
The hunters hold their breath; the trance of noon
Grows tense; with its full power the music draws

A shadow from a juniper's darker shade;
Bright-eyed, with quivering muzzle and pricked ear,
The little musk-deer slips into the glade
Led by an ecstasy that conquers fear.

A wild enchantment lures him, step by step,
Into its net of crystalline sound, until
The leaves stir overhead, the bowstrings snap
And poisoned shafts bite sharp into the kill.

Then, as the victim shudders, leaps and falls,
The music soars to a delicious peak,
And on and on its silvery piping calls
Fresh spoil for the rewards the hunters seek.

But when the woods are emptied and the dusk
Draws in, the men climb down and count their prey,
Cut out the little glands that hold the musk
And leave the carcasses to rot away.

A hundred thousand or so are killed each year;
Cause and effect are very simply linked:
Rich scents demand the musk, and so the deer,
Its source, must soon, they say, become extinct.

Divine Cecilia, there is no more to say!
Of all who praised the power of music, few
Knew of these things. In honour of your day
Accept this song I too have made for you.

Botany Bay or The Rights of Woman

Still highly as I respect marriage, as the foundation of almost every social virtue, I cannot avoid feeling the most lively compassion for those unfortunate females who are broken off from society, and by one error torn from all those affections and relationships that improve the heart and mind. It does not frequently even deserve the name of error; for many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are, as it may emphatically be termed, ruined before they know the difference between virtue and vice, and thus prepared by their education for infamy, they become infamous.

A woman who has lost her honour imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away. Losing her every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge and the character is quickly depraved in circumstances over which the poor wretch has little power, unless she possesses an uncommon portion of sense and loftiness of spirit.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

I

The Age is ended and the Reason too,
To which these various narratives were due,
Yet for some few decades there lingered on
An afterglow, although its sun was gone,
In the young colony of New South Wales.
Look southward, Angel, prompter of these tales
And, in the cradle of my homeland, let
The final history of all be set!
There I was born and live and trust to die
And, since there is no prouder boast that I
Can offer for the country of my birth
Than that she was the first of lands on Earth
To have decreed and given women the vote
And freed the long disfranchised petticoat—
Or rather the first step to make her free
By giving her voice in the democracy—
A first step, for the battle still goes on—
My tale is of her earliest skirmish won
Here in the settlement of Botany Bay,
Impossible in the England of that day
Against the masculine, unthinking brute.

II

Elizabeth Chamberlain, a prostitute
(As would have been the judgement on her then,
When sexual freedom was accorded men
But, by the savage customs of the time,
To be seduced was treated as a crime)
A girl of some intelligence and charm,
Breeding and sense, brought up upon a farm,

In adolescence she had formed a plan
To have her own career like any man.
Well-educated, full of enterprise,
She left her parents' home and family ties
To make her own way. Soon she found a place
As governess, almost the only case
In which genteel young women of her class
Could find employment, as indeed it was
Earlier with Mary Wollstonecraft and then
With the three Brontë sisters once again.
But unlike them, Elizabeth fell in love
With a young gentleman, frequenter of
The mansion where she worked, quite well-to-do,
Pleasant and handsome and persuasive too.
He offered marriage, solicited her to run
Away with him to London, where undone,
Seduced and then abandoned, her one skill
Denied her, with her needle she could still
Find casual employment, just enough
Working long hours to stave starvation off
And pay the rent of an ill-furnished room.
But dressmakers and milliners with whom
She worked, she found, were all so badly paid
That prostitution was their second trade,
And often her work-mates urged her to the same.
Still she held back, restrained by fear and shame
To find herself at last upon the street.
But in the long run, when she faced defeat
And at the lowest ebb, she met with Jem.
Her sempstress friends invited her with them
To a small evening party. He was there,
A large, rough-spoken man, but with an air
Of quiet confidence and easiness
In all his ways. He smiled and called her Bess.
They met again next day, liked what they saw
And liking grew to love. Almost before
They realized this, she went to live with him
And washed and ironed and kept his house in trim.
But what his living was, she could not guess
And when she asked, he answered, "Night-work, Bess,
Well, mostly night-shift, sometimes of a day,
A sort of overseer you might say
Down by the docks in a big factory there."
But would not tell her more. She did not care,
Though doubting his evasions from the first.
Nothing else mattered; she'd survived the worst,
The fate most 'fallen women' had to meet,
That last descent to 'being on the street'.
So life went on for them an even pace;
Comfort and safety, as is often the case,
Dulled fears Bess could not help but entertain.

Jem's absences at night, and then again
His hanging round the house for days on end
It made no sense. Sometimes he brought a friend
And would sit drinking with him while they planned,
In jargon which she did not understand,
—Jem called it the flash language—but which she
Felt in her bones involved conspiracy.
And sometimes—at long intervals indeed—
Sitting late reading, for she loved to read,
She would hear him, long before he reached the house
After an afternoon's prolonged carouse
Coming home quarrelling drunk and violent too,
And more than once he beat her black and blue.
Next day in deep remorse to make amends
He'd foreswear what he called his lush-ken friends.
Although she loved him and although she knew
That when he swore he loved her, it was true,
And though she knew that wife-beating would pass
Scarce noticed among people of his class,
Yet being a woman of spirit and active will
The indignity she suffered rankled still
And, firmly in her heart of hearts she swore
That she would leave him if he beat her more,
Considerations that caused her more distress
Than all her doubts about his business.
One thing was clear: his business prospered so
That when she mentioned not having enough to do
He set her up in business on her own
As dressmaker and milliner in the town,
Where her initiative and common sense
Soon brought them in a modest competence,
And within a twelve-month something more,
A thriving shop that added to their store.

III

I have based Elizabeth's story, more or less,
On that great study of misery and distress
Observed by Henry Mayhew (Volume Four),
His *London Labour and the London Poor*;
And I now turn to Jem's career, of course
My information's based on the same source.
Elizabeth's suspicions, I am afraid,
Were justified: house-breaking was his trade;
Jem was a most successful burglar, but,
In character above the common cut.
A country lad from a north country spot
Apprenticed to a locksmith, he was not
Innocent of opportunities in his trade.
He served his time with credit and then made
His way to London, where he soon became
Expert in what flash language called The Game,

And, though he prospered at it, did not show
The usual easy-come-and-easy-go,
But planned his enterprises far ahead
And 'fly as young Jem Hawkins' people said.
Unlike most cracksmen to whom all is grist
That finds their mill, he was a specialist,
And, having planned a foray without haste,
Took only such goods as could not be traced,
'Dinged' jewels and silver, as they say in flash
And concentrated all his plans on cash.
Within a year or so he had amassed
A tidy sum, but was 'bowled out' at last.
It was bad luck: though not upon a 'job',
He was taken up, charged with intent to rob,
'Having the tools on him' as the phrase went,
Which being proof sufficient of his intent,
The crime, as everybody knew, entails
Seven years' transportation to New South Wales.
Jem, lodged in Newgate, was not much dismayed,
Having all the privileges for which one paid,
Since those who could afford it at that time,
If they had money, regardless of their crime,
Could hire and furnish them a private room,
Have meals brought in, invite their friends to come
On visits and dine and even stay the night.
And affluent Jem assumed them as his right.
And there, by ready money's artful aid
Elizabeth joined him. But she *was* dismayed:
Her life once more in ruins and, her chief
Concern, her Jem, a liar and a thief.
But Jem, though he was penitent and kind,
Firmly forbade all talk till they had dined.
They ate in silence and, their supper done,
Jem told her all from the beginning on,
From the first time he ever picked a lock
Up to the hour when, standing in the dock,
He heard his seven-year sentence. She in tears
Broke out, "How can I bear it Jem? Seven years,
Parted from one another, my dear! How can ...
How could you? ... Why did you not tell me, man,
About yourself, about the way you made
Your living?" "What?," he broke in, "What, my trade?
For I'm a craftsman, though outside the law
And proud of it—but tell you that before?
Nay, it was for your sake that I kept mum,
Or you'd be pulled as my accomplice, chum."
"Jem, that's just what I long for, don't you see,
We'd stay together! Is it too late for me
To break a law and be transported too?"
"Bess, love, there's summat better you can do.
Listen to this, I've nobbed it for a plan

Will save us; an old pal, a 'family man'
Was lagged and now come back from Botany Bay
Told me the trick. The settlers there, they say
As can't get labour, has convict help assigned.
Some wives gets their own man; its easy, mind,
I'll wait here in the hulks, say, half-a-year
Before they finds me transport, never fear!
While you take ship at once to Sydney Cove
And there set up another shop, my love,
Just like the one you're in. Sell that and buy
The stock for your new crib. The meantime I
Will tell ee how to rise my plant, and what
To do then: it's in twig, be sure of that.
What do you say, lass? An't it a prime lurk?"
"Yes, yes, my dearest Jem, but will it work?"
'I'll pound it to be so, it's worked before,
Only if you will promise one thing more."
She promised to do anything he wished.
"Right, lass, before you leave, we must be swished."
"Jem, I knew what you meant about the cash.
But times I lose you, when you speak in Flash.
What does it mean?" "It means we must be wed.
Now I'm a convict, I've no rights," he said,
"But there are things the law cannot undo,
If you be bound to me and I to you."
She smiled and caught his drift. "My cautious dear,
Just as you wish, but you have naught to fear.
All standing for a convict is unsure
But, as a husband you should be secure,
For all I own will then belong to you
As the law stands. In ways you own me too.
Jem, whether I am your mistress or your wife,
I trust my heart to you, my goods, my life;
And it is fair, even though we are friends,
That each holds ties on which the other depends.
But there's one thing on which I shall insist:
—And we must go our ways, if you resist—
I marry only on this condition made,
That you give up forever your so-called trade,
Both after and before you serve your time,
For I will have no partnership in crime."
"Bess, love, you may depend on me for that;
I'll not be lagged a second time, that's flat!"
"Why then, I'll marry you with all my heart,
But how arrange it, seeing we soon must part?
And once convicted, they won't give you bail;
How can we marry with you here in jail?"
"Nay, never fash yoursen, while I've the beans
Even in Newgate there are ways and means.
There's a jail-parson here will do the trick,
His palm greased, he will wed us in the nick."

IV

So Jem and Bess were married and, next day,
She left him, eager to prepare the way.
First to the safe place where Jem's cash was hid,
She put it in the bank as she was bid;
But since she knew its source, Jem's stolen pelf
She would not touch a penny for herself;
Next, found a deputy to run her shop
And act as London agent and back-stop
For goods and needful furnishings to equip
Her new establishments. Then, for the ship,
Packed in five sea-chests, a well-chosen load
Of gowns and millinery in the latest mode
To see her business launched in Sydney Town.
Having made these disposals, she sat down
And scanned the newspapers from day to day
Until a brief advertisement came her way:
"Officer's wife, returning New South Wales,
Requires ship-board companion. Vessel sails
A fortnight hence. Fare paid. Expenses found".
Elizabeth dressed with care, at once went round
In a hired cabriolet to the address
And met with an unqualified success.
The woman, when she had welcomed her ordered tea
And, told her purposes for going to sea,
Exclaimed, "You seem an answer to my prayer.
My dear, I have been almost in despair,
Advertised several times had no replies,
—Perhaps that should occasion no surprise:
A lonely convict settlement, after all,
At the world's end—what likelier to appal
A gentlewoman travelling on her own?
As for my voyage to England, had I known
The vulgar person I was forced to share
My cabin with for all those months—but there,
I had no choice at all. Well you have sprung
At heaven's behest, so charming, fresh and young,
I'm sure that we shall get on famously.
Miss Chamberlain, may I offer you more tea?
You have not travelled before? I must explain,
It's a long trip; we have to entertain
Each other—tell me, do you like to read?"
"Yes," said Elizabeth, "I do indeed.
It is my favourite pastime; pray, do you?"
"How pleasing! I have books enough for two
And, since you are a sempstress, as you tell,
Apart from books, we may talk clothes as well."
They parted from each other, already friends.
Elizabeth tidied up her odds and ends,
Sent her stock to an earlier ship, wrote Jem

Her new arrangements and, defending them,
Explained it was the best she could afford
With her own means. Next day she went aboard.
The voyage was speedy once they passed the Cape
And both of the young women were in good shape
And in high spirits; they read, they talked, they sang
And peals of laughter from their cabin rang
And, as their friendship grew, Elizabeth
Felt her heart lightened of that dread beneath
Which it had laboured constantly for years.
But the society of her former peers
And their acceptance was what cheered her most.
Her sense of being 'a fallen woman' once lost,
She made determined plans to rise again
And once, discussing the tyranny of men
Over their sex with Laura, her new friend,
Laura remarked, "I have a mind to lend
One of my books upon that theme, which I
Found quite compelling; would you care to try?"
Elizabeth read the classic trumpet blast
By Mary Wollstonecraft and found at last
Her burgeoning ideas fall into place.
And expressly applied to her own case
The passage placed as preface to this tale.
She had not mentioned Jem in Newgate jail,
But told her friend, "My husband plans to come
When he has settled his affairs at home
In our joint business enterprise. My part
Has been to go before and make a start."
And Laura proved, accepting these small lies,
A mine of information and advice.

So with her help, when they at last made land,
Elizabeth soon found, as she had planned,
A shop in Pitts Row with two rooms behind,
A high, stout fence, a garden plot, a kind
Of storeroom, workshop, tool and potting-shed
Where Jem, when he arrived could make his bed.
Next, in the Government Gazette she made
A brief announcement and her goods displayed.
Since all the other shops in town, she found,
Were 'general stores', and Laura spread around
News of materials, costumes and designs
In a new dress-shop run on London lines,
Her opening day was an immense success,
And she, so charming found that she, no less,
Was welcomed. In this small society
All were received, provided they were free.
She settled down to wait and, as her store
Was fast bought up, wrote back to home for more.

V

Jem's fortunes on his voyage did not compare
With his Elizabeth's. He could not bear
Confinement or her absence. Then he fell
Ill with jail-fever, while still in prison, as well.
Taken raving to the prison hospital,
For days on end there seemed no hope at all;
But, young and strong, he rallied in the end
Until they judged him fit enough to send
Down to the floating hulks. He waited there,
Six mortal months of vermin and foul air,
For transportation to this continent.
The voyage was dreadful. Most of it was spent
Between decks and in double irons because
He cursed an officer and threatened force.
It was no wonder then, though he survived,
Jem was in wretched state when he arrived.

VI

Jem had contrived, while at the hulks to send
Intelligence to Elizabeth, by a friend,
Naming the ship to which he was consigned.
So when it came, she closed her shop to find
Herself a handyman to do her chores
And fetch and carry for her out-of-doors.
And down the hill she tripped alert and gay
To where her love was anchored in the bay.
With beating heart she watched the deck and saw
The convicts mustered there and rowed ashore,
But, on the wharf, could scarce believe her eyes;
Jem, she admitted, looked a sorry prize,
Gaunt from a voyage of nine months on the way,
Most of it spent in irons or the sick bay.
To this add the debilitating brew
Of loathsome smiggins and of foul burgoo.
She bid for him and soon obtained her price
And, the indenture signed, she bade him rise
And follow her, his irons being struck off.
And Jem obeyed her with ill-grace enough:
A woman giving orders to a man!
So with a rough grunt their new life began.
As with her convict husband new-assigned
She walked ahead, Jem followed on behind.
Hating her elegance, nursing his wrath,
He lurched along the Tank Stream's dusty path.
But when they reached the shop and stepped inside,
Her stiffness melted and his anger died;
And in each other's arms awhile they stood
Each conscious of the other's throbbing blood.
The weary months, the barren seas between
Now seemed at last as though they'd never been.

But when he clutched her fiercelier she said,
“No, darling Jem, before we go to bed,
And that I wish as heartily as you,
One thing you positively have to do,
Is have a long, hot bath. My dear, you smell!
And I've a meal prepared for you as well,
When you are clean. Here, take these buckets to
The Tank Stream dams we passed awhile ago,
And draw yourself a bath. The fire is set
And here's the tub. Go on now, while I get
Out the fresh clothes I have for you to wear
And dinner going. After that ship-board fare,
Salt junk and mouldy biscuit you will think
It quite a feast. I've saved for you to drink
A bottle of prime claret, given me
In payment for some haberdashery.
—Here we live much by barter, did you know?—
Dear Jem, how I run on! But you must go;
Go now or else you'll have me talk all day.
But, Lord, my dear, there is so much to say!”
She pushed him out the door and on its lock
She hung a notice: ‘Closed for Taking Stock’.
Jem bathed and shaved and in a new suit dressed,
They sat down radiant to their little feast.
A roast duck with potatoes and green peas,
Cabbage from Kissing Point and strawberries
Served afterwards with cream and then mince pies.
They gave their tongues no rest nor yet their eyes.
But long before even the half was said
They left the board and took themselves to bed.

VII

Husband and wife, as their new life began,
Found reason to applaud their artful plan.
The business prospered and their garden throve;
They had each other and were deep in love.
Jem fetched and carried goods from ships in port,
Delivered orders and, for things they bought,
If customers paid in kind with wheat or wood
He bargained with the surplus for their food
So well that soon he added to their store.
Elizabeth, in favour as before,
So kept their secret with her grace and youth
That none of her acquaintance guessed the truth.
Having taken a male servant, it is true,
There was some gossip and, with this in view,
Jem, banished to the hut at the back fence,
Felt some resentment; but he had the sense
To keep the strict rule this society
Set between the convicted and the free.
So he wore convict dress and stood aside

To let a soldier pass and even tried
Though with ill-grace enough, when Bess bespoke
To parties, bade him follow with her cloak,
While she within played cards or danced, to wait
With other convict servants at the gate,
Or, at whatever hour she bade him come,
With his horn-lantern fetch her safely home.

Jem, though an honest burglar as we saw,
Like other heroes nursed a fatal flaw
And that was drink, and drink in turn gave vent
To fits of rage that made him violent.
And, though his love restrained him at the first
He had amassed a mighty twelve-month thirst
While waiting in the hulks and then at sea,
And Sydney Cove, so short of currency,
Used grog for money and drank it out of hand.
Though, by decree, for convicts it was banned,
In practice they contrived to have their way
And soldiers, to augment their meagre pay,
Would buy it from the ships and not ask why,
But sell to anyone with cash to buy.
Jem who had leisure time and cash to spare,
Soon after landing, fell into this snare.
He formed a habit, when his work was through,
To meet a friend and take a dram or two
And, though he managed to keep himself in hand,
About a twelve-month after making land,
One evening in a tavern drinking late
He came home in the black and drunken state
Which she remembered and recalled with dread.
She had long given him up and gone to bed
When she heard maudlin singing in the street,
Next at the back gate, oaths and stumbling feet.
She left her bed and stood in her night-gown;
"Jem," she called out, "Jem darling quieten down!
For if the neighbors hear you swear and sing,
So late here, it will ruin everything."
They met in their small parlour at the back;
Her candle showed an ugly mood and black
And, when she went to him, he threw a rough
Punch at her face: "You blowen, I've had enough!
Don't come the bloody lady over me!
I'll lush red tape if I'm so minded, see!
I'm sick of taking orders. Hold your jaw,
Or by the living God, you'll get what for."
She looked at him awhile: "O Jem," she said,
"I've had enough too dear; best get to bed."
She went back to her room and locked the door.
Jem kicked and battered, bellowed, raged and swore
Come the next morning, he would baste the bitch

And kick her out of doors without a stitch.

Next morning she closed shop, the reason why
Was plain to see: he'd given her a black eye
But Jem was cheerful, came in with a shout:
"O, what a lovely shiner!", he burst out.
She answered quietly, not to put him down,
"Jem, I've an errand for you in the town."
"What errand's that, Bess?" She did not reply,
But, breakfast over, with a steadfast sigh,
She went to a small escritoire and wrote,
Folded and sealed and handed him the note.
"Please take this to the Magistrate," she said,
"Then come back here; you'll need to go to bed."
"Nay, Bess, lass, tell me what's this all about?"
He grumbled, but she answered, "You'll find out."
"You'd better tell now. I've a right to know.
If it's about last night, then I don't go!"
He took a step towards her, fist raised high,
Suspicion and defiance in his eye.
She stood and saw unmoved his threatening hand.
"My love, some things you have to understand.
But you are right, you have a right to know
And to decide if you accept or no.
Sit down, Jem! There's a lot I must explain
Ere we two can live happily again.
There are things we must decide today to do
And others on which, maybe, your life hangs too.
The first of these is—let us get this clear—
What passed in London, Jem, will not do here.
There once or twice you beat me, I admit,
And even there I hated you for it,
But, since I knew you loved me, I would think
It was not you who beat me but the drink.
I was your fancy woman. In this new life,
I am no more your doxy but your wife
Who loves you as an equal, if you learn
To treat her as an equal in return;
Something I knew but could not say before
When I was little better than your whore.
A book I read, Jem, on the voyage out,
Showed me my dream could now be brought about;
And I resolved, upon those heaving decks,
To end the ancient feud of sex with sex.
You're a good man, my love, and staunch and true;
What life I have, I wish to spend with you."
Jem, who had glowered through her opening speech,
Patted her hand which lay within his reach
And muttered, "Don't take on, Bess, that's alright!
I'm truly sorry, lass, for yesternight."
"You're truly sorry, my dear, I know, but then

Can you warrant me it will not happen again?
You can't, I know, but you're a proper man.
I am a woman and I think I can.
Jem, there's one way, my love, and only one
To save ourselves now—and in the long run:
You are my husband; that must not come out
Or you'll be taken from me, there's no doubt.
But, in the eyes of this community,
You are a convict and employed by me.
Last night's to-do, before the sun goes down,
Depend on it, will be all round the town.
I have no choice but to report you, Jem,
And you'll be punished—but that's up to them—
You must accept, too, what the courts direct;
Six lashes is the least you can expect.
This note reports you merely brawling drunk.
If I report the blow, we'd both be sunk.
You'd be assigned the chain-gang at the least
Flogged to a pulp, your seven-year term increased
Perhaps to life. It could be worse, I fear.
You know, we have no trial by jury here;
Bashing one's master's a most serious crime
And frequent. Should the court decide the time
Has come for worse deterrents than the cat,
Jem, you could hang: it must not come to that!
And there's another thing: If I keep still
And don't report you, there are those who will.
The neighbors do not love us, I'm afraid,
And three of them are rivals in the trade.
They would be pleased—informers here are rife—
If it were shown that we are man and wife.
You're a convicted felon, as for me,
For the first time in all my life, I'm free
And mean to stay so and, when you are too,
Make a new life together, just we two
In equal partnership, in equal trust.
Will you not make the effort?—Jem, you must!
Will you not venture with so much at stake?
I say no more. The choice is yours to make.”
They sat together in silence for a while
Until Jem chuckled and answered with a smile,
“Reckon I've earned it then: alright, I'll go.
Bess, you're a rare one: got me trussed, I know.”
So Jem took his six lashes and a stern
Warning that if he ever should return
With fresh complaints he could expect to draw
Upon him the full penalty of the law.
He trudged back to the shop. Little was said.
Elizabeth dressed his weals, put him to bed
And, giving a head-cold as the reason why,
She closed shop on account of the black eye,

And nursed and gentled him for a full week.
And yet, for all her care, Jem would not speak,
But seemed withdrawn into himself and grim.
She had no means to tell what troubled him,
Whether it was his pride or else his heart
Or being over-reached had made him smart,
Or whether vengeance moved him or remorse.
But she resolved to let things take their course
And went on just as usual day by day,
Cheerful and friendly, business-like and gay
And her reward was seeing him unbend
To joke and argue with her in the end
And greet her every morning with a kiss.

VIII

It happened about six months after this,
That Jem, his chores done, smoked and took his ease,
Watering his broad-beans and his cabbages,
In the small garden plot behind the shop,
Heard footsteps cautiously approach and stop
Outside the gate. A voice called him by name,
A voice he recognized as from the Game:
“Jem, hey Jem Hawkins? Aye, for sure it be.
Unbar the gate; I'd drop a whid with thee.
I'm an old pal.” And when Jem let him in
With, “Jack, so you was lagged!”, said with a grin,
“Aye, I was snitched on. If I warn't seen come
Let's go where we can whiddle in your back-slum.”
When they were in, “Now Jem, let's get to work.
I've touted this crib; it's a tidy lurk.
If you'll be in it, we will each go whack.
I know as you was done, chum, for a crack,
Fined for the tools, not taken with the swag.
See, I'm lagged for my wind, you're just a lag.
But stow that! This is a sweet job; no need
To betty or screw the jigger: we just weed.
When Madam Mollisher's gone off to bed,
You bring a cant of dobbin to this shed,
Or driz or other toggery, duds-crib stuff.
Don't over-do it, pal, but just enough
As won't be missed so no-one has a down,
—Trust me to do it away upon the town—
And sometimes, not too often, milk the lob.
I tell you, it's as good as caz, this job.
It's plummy! What do you say?” But Jem's reply
Was short, “Jack, I don't do things on the sly.
It ain't no use, Jack. Now I'm on the square,
I've turned up prigging, see! And should you dare
Show yourself here again, or should you split,
I'll bash you first, then see you sold for it.”
“So it's the covess! You've turned pensioner

And dance the blanket horn-pipe now with her?
Nice work, old chum ...”—“Stow that! Jack! Hold your jaw!
Get going! or I'll be upon your taw.”
Jack took the hint, and though no more was heard
Of him or of his schemes, Jem kept his word.
A model convict, model husband too,
He merited when half his time was through,
A ticket-of-leave, which granted, left him free
To choose a trade, whatever it might be.
He chose the one in which he'd served his time
And had professed before he turned to crime.
He took a shop, not far away from Bess
And mended locks with even more success
Than he had picked their mechanisms before
Now they proclaimed their marriage, what is more,
Founded a family, and although Jem laughed,
Christened their first girl, Mary Wollstonecraft.

IX

They say one false step's ne'er retrieved. I think
It is, if folk are not pushed to the brink.
That's why I like this land where they can grow
In ways that let them have a second go,
As Jem and his Elizabeth surely did.
But had Elizabeth not in time got rid
Of those absurd obsessions which her sex
Found fastened in that age about their necks,
She and her children, children's children too,
Might to this day have had good cause to rue.
A chance at a new life on a new shore
Was something, certainly, but even more
Those virtues which the Age of Reason presents:
Intelligence, enterprise, and common sense!

This tale may have a moral; just what it was,
I leave my readers arguing the toss.

Advice to Young Ladies

A.U.C. 334: about this date
For a sexual misdemeanour, which she denied,
The vestal virgin Postumia was tried.
Livy records it among affairs of state.

They let her off: it seems she was perfectly pure;
The charge arose because some thought her talk
Too witty for a young girl, her eyes, her walk
Too lively, her clothes too smart to be demure.

The Pontifex Maximus, summing up the case,
Warned her in future to abstain from jokes,
To wear less modish and more pious frocks.
She left the court reprieved, but in disgrace.

What then? With her the annalist is less
Concerned than what the men achieved that year:
Plots, quarrels, crimes, with oratory to spare!
I see Postumia with her dowdy dress,

Stiff mouth and listless step; I see her strive
To give dull answers. She had to knuckle down.
A vestal virgin who scandalized that town
Had fair trial, then they buried her alive.

Alive, bricked up in suffocating dark,
A ration of bread, a pitcher if she was dry,
Preserved the body they did not wish to die
Until her mind was quenched to the last spark.

How many the black maw has swallowed in its time!
Spirited girls who would not know their place;
Talented girls who found that the disgrace
Of being a woman made genius a crime;

How many others, who would not kiss the rod
Domestic bullying broke or public shame?
Pagan or Christian, it was much the same:
Husbands, St Paul declared, rank next to God.

Livy and Paul, it may be, never knew
That Rome was doomed; each spoke of her with pride.
Tacitus, writing after both had died,
Showed that whole fabric rotten through and through.

Historians spend their lives and lavish ink
Explaining how great commonwealths collapse

From great defects of policy—perhaps
The cause is sometimes simpler than they think.

It may not seem so grave an act to break
Postumia's spirit as Galileo's, to gag
Hypatia as crush Socrates, or drag
Joan as Giordano Bruno to the stake.

Can we be sure? Have more states perished, then,
For having shackled the enquiring mind,
Than those who, in their folly not less blind,
Trusted the servile womb to breed free men?

The Young Girl at the Ball

While the young girl, with her full breasts and thighs
Eloquent through her clothes, moves as a tree
Bends and returns against the torrents of air,
The voice of my Demon falters, the babble dies
Around me; and, as the music ends, I see
Her smile and watch her walking back to her chair.

When I was young I should have found in her arms
My venture, my voyage, the talisman and the sign,
Had I straddled her beautiful flanks or gathered her breast in my hand.
Each turn of the fabulous way would be quick with alarms
Where the dreadful crags thrust up through their forests of pine
And the dragons stirred in their dens as I rode through that land.

Had I been older, I should have entered her gate
As a traveller coming home to the cherished fire
Of a house where the heart goes in and out at its need;
I should have learned to move to her music, to wait
Through all the returning seasons of desire
For ripeness, and seen her belly abundant with my seed.

I have journeyed; I have come home; it is late in the year to depart.
She will not move to my arms or come to my bed.
She turns and smiles into other eyes than mine.
What is it, then, tears at my animal heart?
As I watched her dance, in every gesture I read
The challenge, the summons, the unmistakeable sign

Of the sensual miracle: Now, at last, I see
Those hidden presences and powers, aware
Of a promise kept, of mysteries revealed;
Just as the eye observes from the motions of the tree
All the invisible energies of the air
In the toss and recoil of boughs in an open field.

The Return of Persephone

Gliding through the still air, he made no sound;
Wing-shod and deft, dropped almost at her feet,
And searched the ghostly regiments and found
The living eyes, the tremor of breath, the beat
Of blood in all that bodiless underground.

She left her majesty; she loosed the zone
Of darkness and put by the rod of dread.
Standing, she turned her back upon the throne
Where, well she knew, the Ruler of the Dead,
Lord of her body and being, sat like stone;

Stared with his ravenous eyes to see her shake
The midnight drifting from her loosened hair,
The girl once more in all her actions wake,
The blush of colour in her cheeks appear
Lost with her flowers that day beside the lake.

The summer flowers scattering, the shout,
The black manes plunging down to the black pit—
Memory or dream? She stood awhile in doubt,
Then touched the Traveller God's brown arm and met
His cool, bright glance and heard his words ring out:

“Queen of the Dead and Mistress of the Year!”
—His voice was the ripe ripple of the corn;
The touch of dew, the rush of morning air—
“Remember now the world where you were born;
The month of your return at last is here.”

And still she did not speak, but turned again
Looking for answer, for anger, for command:
The eyes of Dis were shut upon their pain;
Calm as his marble brow, the marble hand
Slept on his knee. Insuperable disdain

Foreknowing all bounds of passion, of power, of art,
Mastered but could not mask his deep despair.
Even as she turned with Hermes to depart,
Looking her last on her grim ravisher
For the first time she loved him from her heart.

Parabola

Year after year the princess lies asleep
Until the hundred years foretold are done,
Easily drawing her enchanted breath.
Caught on the monstrous thorns around the keep,
Bones of the youths who sought her, one by one
Rot loose and rattle to the ground beneath.

But when the Destined Lover at last shall come,
For whom alone Fortune reserves the prize,
The thorns give way; he mounts the cobwebbed stair;
Unerring he finds the tower, the door, the room,
The bed where, waking at his kiss she lies
Smiling in the loose fragrance of her hair.

That night, embracing on the bed of state,
He ravishes her century of sleep
And she repays the debt of that long dream;
Future and Past compose their vast debate;
His seed now sown, her harvest ripe to reap
Enact a variation on the theme.

For in her womb another princess waits,
A sleeping cell, a globule of bright dew.
Jostling their way up that mysterious stair,
A horde of lovers bursts between the gates,
All doomed but one, the destined suitor, who
By luck first reaches her and takes her there.

A parable of all we are or do!
The life of Nature is a formal dance
In which each step is ruled by what has been
And yet the pattern emerges always new
The marriage of linked cause and random chance
Gives birth perpetually to the unforeseen.

One parable for the body and the mind:
With science and heredity to thank,
The heart is quite predictable as a pump,
But, let love change its beat, the choice is blind.
“Now” is a cross-roads where all maps prove blank,
And no one knows which way the cat will jump.

So here stand I, by birth a cross between
Determined pattern and incredible chance,
Each with an equal share in what I am.
Though I should read the code stored in the gene,
Yet the blind lottery of circumstance

Mocks all solutions to its cryptogram.

As in my flesh, so in my spirit stand I
When does *this* hundred years draw to its close?
The hedge of thorns before me gives no clue.
My predecessor's carcass, shrunk and dry,
Stares at me through the spikes. Oh well, here goes!
I have this thing, and only this, to do.

Phallus

This was the gods' god,
The leashed divinity,
Divine divining rod
And Me within the me.

By mindlight tower and tree
Its shadow on the ground
Throw, and in darkness she
Whose weapon is her wound

Fends off the knife, the sword,
The Tiger and the Snake;
It stalks the virgin's bed
And bites her wide awake.

Her Bab-el-Mandeb waits
Her Red Sea gate of tears:
The blood-sponge god dilates,
His rigid pomp appears;

Sets in the toothless mouth
A tongue of prophecy.
It speaks in naked Truth
Indifference for me

Love, a romantic slime
That lubricates his way
Against the stream of Time.
And though I win the day

His garrisons deep down
Ignore my victory,
Abandon this doomed town,
Crawl through a sewer and flee.

A certain triumph, of course,
Bribes me with brief joy:
Stiffly my Wooden Horse
Receive into your Troy.

Making Love

“What are you doing?” he said,
They said: “We are making love.”
“Is it made in the heart or the head,
And what do you make it of?”

“That is hard for us to say;
We make it up as we go
And it vanishes away
As soon as it's made, you know.”

“What instruments go to make
Such fleeting and fragile stuff?”
“Two hearts that rejoice and ache
For each other are quite enough.”

“Is it easy to make?” “O yes,
Though there's no sure rule for it;
Each time we must gamble, and guess
How this time the pieces fit.”

“But what when their joiners cease,
And the makers can make no more?”
“Then it leaves the spirit at peace,
But the heart, the heart sore.”

His Coy Mistress To Mr. Marvell

Since you have world enough and time
Sir, to admonish me in rhyme,
Pray Mr Marvell, can it be
You think to have persuaded me?
Then let me say: you want the art
To woo, much less to win my heart.
The verse was splendid, all admit,
And, sir, you have a pretty wit.
All that indeed your poem lacked
Was logic, modesty, and tact,
Slight faults and ones to which I own,
Your sex is generally prone;
But though you lose your labour, I
Shall not refuse you a reply:

First, for the language you employ:
A term I deprecate is "coy";
The ill-bred miss, the bird-brained Jill,
May simper and be coy at will;
A lady, sir, as you will find,
Keeps counsel, or she speaks her mind,
Means what she says and scorns to fence
And palter with feigned innocence.

The ambiguous "mistress" next you set
Beside this graceless epithet.
"Coy mistress", sir? Who gave you leave
To wear my heart upon your sleeve?
Or to imply, as sure you do,
I had no other choice than you
And must remain upon the shelf
Unless I should bestir myself?
Shall I be moved to love you, pray,
By hints that I must soon decay?
No woman's won by being told
How quickly she is growing old;
Nor will such ploys, when all is said,
Serve to stampede us into bed.

When from pure blackmail, next you move
To bribe or lure me into love,
No less inept, my rhyming friend,
Snared by the means, you miss your end.
"Times winged chariot", and the rest
As poetry may pass the test;
Readers will quote those lines, I trust,
Till you and I and they are dust;

But I, your destined prey, must look
Less at the bait than at the hook,
Nor, when I do, can fail to see
Just what it is you offer me:
Love on the run, a rough embrace
Snatched in the fury of the chase,
The grave before us and the wheels
Of Time's grim chariot at our heels,
While we, like "am'rous birds of prey",
Tear at each other by the way.

To say the least, the scene you paint
Is, what you call my honour, quaint!
And on this point what prompted you
So crudely, and in public too,
To canvass and, indeed, make free
With my entire anatomy?
Poets have licence, I confess,
To speak of ladies in undress;
Thighs, hearts, brows, breasts are well enough,
In verses this is common stuff;
But -- well I ask: to draw attention
To worms in -- what I blush to mention,
And prate of dust upon it too!
Sir, was this any way to woo?

Now therefore, while male self-regard
Sits on your cheek, my hopeful bard,
May I suggest, before we part,
The best way to a woman's heart
Is to be modest, candid, true;
Tell her you love and show you do;
Neither cajole nor condescend
And base the lover on the friend;
Don't bustle her or fuss or snatch:
A suitor looking at his watch
Is not a posture that persuades
Willing, much less reluctant maids.

Remember that she will be stirred
More by the spirit than the word;
For truth and tenderness do more
Than coruscating metaphor.
Had you addressed me in such terms
And prattled less of graves and worms,
I might, who knows, have warmed to you;
But, as things stand, must bid adieu
(Though I am grateful for the rhyme)
And wish you better luck next time.

The School of Night

What did I study in your School of Night?
When your mouth's first unfathomable yes
Opened your body to be my book, I read
My answers there and learned the spell aright,
Yet, though I searched and searched, could never guess
What spirits it raised nor where their questions led.

Those others, familiar tenants of your sleep,
The whisperers, the grave somnambulists
Whose eyes turn in to scrutinize their woe,
The giant who broods above the nightmare steep,
That sleeping girl, shuddering, with clenched fists,
A vampire baby suckling at her toe,

They taught me most. The scholar held his pen
And watched his blood drip thickly on the page
To form a text in unknown characters
Which, as I scanned them, changed and changed again:
The lines grew bars, the bars a Delphic cage
And I the captive of his magic verse.

Going to Bed

Chloe, let down that chestnut hair;
Let it flow full; let it fall free;
Loosen that zone, those clasps that bare
Your breasts: then leave the rest to me.
First like a cloud your dress shall float
Over your shoulders and away;
And next the faithless petticoat
Those exquisite, breathing flanks display;
Stockings and drawers I shall peel off
From your lithe legs and lovely thighs,
And think the rustling silks you slough
The foam from which, new-born, you rise.
Thus Love in mime despoils this world:
Fashions, beliefs and customs fall;
In brutal, naked grace unfurled
He shows the root and ground of all.
But when his power has stripped us stark,
These purged and primal selves shall find
A better and a brighter mark
Than those poor ventures of mankind;
For we whose fate is to retrace
The labyrinth and re-wind the clew,
All patterns of the past erase
And find our world begins anew.
Our nature then puts off, my dear,
What parts it from the true divine:
Bare as the gods we must appear
And as those blessed beings shine.
A single, soaring flame shall bound,
Frame and enfold our nakedness;
And with that glory clothed and crowned
Our souls shall want no other dress.
No roof can shelter us, no house
That falls to ruin as fabrics must;
No crumbling temple hear our vows
Or sanction that immortal lust.
Our bed must be the bracken brown
Or the waste dunes beside the sea,
And the wide heaven arching down
Our portion of eternity.

The Lamp

Night and the sea; the firelight glowing;
We sit in silence by the hearth;
I musing, you beside me sewing,
We glean the long day's aftermath.
After the romping surf, the laughter,
The salt and sun, the roaring beach,
These flames glancing on wall and rafter
Are tongues of pentecostal speech.
And while their whispers come and go, I
Turn to watch you in your grace,
My gallant, radiant, reckless Chloe,
Who love and lead me such a chase,
To find it vanished, that incessant
Fulfilment of the urgent Now:
For here, absolved from past and present,
There broods a girl I do not know.
The clear, the gay, the brilliant nature
Matching your body's pride, gives place
To a soft, wavering change of feature:
This grave, remote and troubled face;
A face all women have in common
When, lost within them'selves, alone,
They hear the demiourgos summon
And draw their ocean like the moon.
The moon is up; the beaches glisten,
The land grows faceless as the sea;
And you withdraw and, while you listen,
Put on your anonymity.
I hear my pulses, as they travel,
Drop one by one to the abyss;
I feel the skein of life unravel
And ask in dread: who then is this ?
Who is this shade that sits beside me
And on what errand has she come:
To drive me on the dark, or guide me,
To tempt, or bring my spirit home ?
Or is she lost herself, uncertain
And helpless on that timeless track ?
Whichever way, I draw the curtain
And light the lamp that brings us back.

Evening Star

Do men too on some war-torn planet
Look up into their evening sky
And, sick and desperate as they scan it,
Raise a wild, all-too-human cry?

Till in its vast serene forgetting,
Their wrenched minds find at last release
To see our earth above them setting
Its lamp of sanity and peace?

IAN MUDIE

1911–1976

Ian Mayelston Mudie (1911–1976), poet, was born on 1 March 1911 at Hawthorn, Adelaide, younger child of South Australian-born parents Henry Mayelston Mudie, bank accountant, and his second wife Gertrude Mary, née Wurm. Ian was educated (1920–26) at Scotch College, Adelaide, but showed more interest in extra-curricular reading than in study and left without gaining his Leaving certificate. At the office of the registrar-general, Adelaide, on 30 October 1934 he married Renee Dunford Doble. From his early twenties writing was Mudie's chief activity, although the difficulties in providing for his family as a freelancer forced him to try his hand as a wool-scourer, furniture-dealer, grape-picker, and as a salesman of insurance and real estate.

Mudie published his first poem in 1931, but it was not until **P. R. Stephensen** included his work in the *Publicist* in October 1937 that his career as a poet began to flourish. Attracted by Stephensen's nationalism, he moved to Sydney where he was elected to the executive-committee of the Australia-First Movement at its inaugural meeting in October 1941. He was committed to the organization's second aim—'To encourage the development of a distinctively-Australian National Culture in Australia'—and there is no evidence that he showed sympathy for the German or Japanese governments. Stephensen and fifteen other A.F.M. members were arrested on 10 March 1942 on suspicion of collaborating with the Japanese. Mudie, by chance, had returned to Adelaide before the arrests.

Encouraged by Stephensen's interest in him, by a close friendship with **Miles Franklin** and by praise from literary figures such as **Xavier Herbert**, Mudie rapidly produced *Corroboree to the Sun* (Melbourne, 1940), *This Is Australia* (1941), *Their Seven Stars Unseen* (1943), *The Australian Dream* (1943)—winner of the **W. J. Miles** prize—and *Poems* (Melbourne, 1945). He was almost six feet (183 cm) tall and of wiry build, and was once described as looking like a shearer. Gregarious and fiercely egalitarian, Mudie embodied much of the traditional version of Australian identity that he celebrated in his best-known poem, 'They'll Tell You About Me'. A deep love of the land and its inhabitants are recurrent themes in his poetry; so, too, are harsh criticisms of the Europeans for the way they treated the indigenous people and desecrated the environment.

At this time Mudie's nationalism and concern for Aborigines found an outlet in a loose association with **Rex Ingamells** and the Jindyworobak poets. He contributed (from 1939) to their anthologies, joined (1941) their club and edited the *Jindyworobak Anthology* (1946). Having been called up for full-time duty in the Militia in 1942, he served in anti-aircraft units and ordnance depots in Australia. He edited the anthology, *Poets at War* (Melbourne, 1944), and, on being discharged in 1945, took up a Commonwealth Literary Fund fellowship to carry out research into paddle-steamers on the Murray and Darling rivers. His gift for establishing rapport allowed him to collect many stories from old-timers and eventually to publish *Riverboats* (1961). His other writing included two histories, *Wreck of the Admella* (1966) and *The Heroic Journey of John McDouall Stuart* (Sydney, 1968), numerous newspaper articles and short stories, productions such as *Glenelg Sketchbook* (1974), a children's story, *The Christmas Kangaroo* (1946), and several edited books, including *Australian Poets Speak* (1961) on which he collaborated

with his friend Colin Thiele.

After a decade in which the riverboats were sometimes an obsessive preoccupation, Mudie again turned to poetry, publishing *The Blue Crane* (Sydney, 1959), *The North-Bound Rider* (1963)—winner of the Grace Leven prize—*Look, the Kingfisher!* (Melbourne, 1970) and *Selected Poems 1934-1974* (Melbourne, 1976). While the poems from this period retain his earlier commitments and often colloquial style, they are less strident, and place more emphasis on personal reflection and city life.

Mudie was a keen evangelist for Australian literature. He was active in the Australian Society of Authors, national president (1959-60) of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, editor-in-chief (1960-65) of Rigby Ltd, publishers, and an organizer of Writers' Week at the Adelaide Festival of Arts from its inception in 1960 until 1972. A great communicator, he lectured to adult education classes at the University of Adelaide, taught at the South Australian School of Arts and conducted speaking tours for the Commonwealth Literary Fund. Survived by his wife and two sons, he died of a coronary occlusion on 23 October 1976 in London and was cremated; his ashes were scattered on the Murray River.

Glory of the Sun

THESE are my people, these are the nationless
caught between blackness and the undreamt dawn;
these are my people, their stars unseen
bright-burning in unfound Alcheringa.
Yet these my people fight and ride
from the nearest shore to the furthest tide.
These are my people, their souls possessed
by myths that slaver from Europa's bull
while Europe rides her lover-beast through mire
of all her thousand years of infamy.
Yet – these my people – their wild vitality
ploughed upwards in one page of history.
These are my people, who unknowing starve
for all that strength with which their country's breasts
stretch taut and full; dry tongues and parching lips
thirst for the milk of loveliness which she
holds for their mouths that scorn to touch her flesh.
Yet these my people when they wander far
dream of the wattle and the waratah.
These are my people, each one idly drifts
on his own creek or his own billabong
heading nowhere; the Murray's single flow
points no swift moral for meandering hearts
nor marches its strong vigor through their verse.
Yet these my people, unity their dream,
once flowed one instant in a single stream.
These are my people, who let vision slip
back to the stubble-land of last year's crop;
glory they let slip for gold, wisdom for ease
and self-reliance for dull luxury's pursuit;
making this land vassal, they proclaimed
culture subservient to alien trade.
Yet these my people have produced such sons
as history shall remember while it runs.
These are my people, only by the earth
that seeks to suckle them shall attain
to nationhood, only by living dreams
built of the air they breathe shall they escape
the trap between the blackness and the dawn;
only by following their seven stars
Shall these my people reach Alcheringas.
These are my people, these the nationless
caught between blackness and the undreamt dawn;
these are my people, their stars unseen
bright-burning in unfound Alcheringa.
These are my people, how many years shall run
before they drink the glory of the sun?

Mental Expatriates

IN their looking backward is a twisted vista;
light bends for them, perspective takes a kink
and swings to the Europe-world.
For them the English trees have grown, and choked
with barrier the avenue of gums.
Colour-blind, or like the cave-blind fish
that lives so long in dark it cannot see in sun,
they stare to the dark cave of the northern skies
and will not see the colours of our scene.
For them there are no ghosts in this our land,
only the weary migrant few that rode
in English minds to the Australian shore.
For them there is no oldness in this land,
the polished axe made no long roads of trade
from north to south, man did not watch
fire mountains rise and glaciers flow,
rivers give up their waters to the sand,
mountains wear down to plain.
For them there is no oldness in this land –
white flesh, for them, and Europe tales,
wiped out the stories of our earth.

Here History Lives

NO DREAR depressing depth covers our earth;
no depth of history clutters our land.
Here history lives; here crimes and cities
lie not – souring by heritage – in earth.
Here no vast encumbrances of age,
of old and dreary wars, boredoms of princes,
famines, hates, fears, lies, eternal shames,
bear down their weight upon our vital day.
History is here no toothless, peevish fool
In nightcap, piling grave upon grave,
Tombstone on tombstone, above ambition.
Here history lives; here history
- a lusty stripling soon to his prime –
races beside us, hurrying us along
with crowded memories of a changing speed
from spear to plane in what was built a day's
long, fog-grey, depression in those lands
where history died before Australian shores
dawned in men's visions. Here history lives;
history is ours to make. – Shall we import
some imitative past to bury all our dreams
in history's grave, or shall we write
upon the page that waits for dawning tale
of nationhood, of unity, of looking
forward to the day when we shall be
the living sword of stars that some now dream.

DOUGLAS STEWART

(1913 – 1985)

Douglas Alexander Stewart was born on 6 May 1913, at Eltham, Taranaki, New Zealand. The second of five children of Alexander Armstrong Stewart, a schoolteacher and later lawyer originally from Melbourne, and his wife Mary (née Fitzgerald), Stewart enjoyed a happy childhood, which he would describe in his late memoir, *Springtime in Taranaki* (1983). He attended a private school from the age of four, and, aged eight, began attending Eltham Public School, where he claimed to have made the decision to become an author. At the age of twelve, he won a scholarship to a boarding school, New Plymouth Boys' High, where he began writing poems and stories. Disappointed that the poems he sent to the local paper were published on the children's page, Stewart began sending his work to the *Bulletin* in Australia. While rejected by the *Bulletin*, one of the paper's editors, Cecil Mann, saw to it that some of Stewart's poems appeared in another Sydney paper in the *Bulletin* stable, the *Australian Women's Mirror*.

Stewart briefly studied law at the Victoria University of Wellington, but lacked interest in his studies and failed his exams. Leaving Wellington and law for journalism back in Taranaki, he was briefly the sole reporter for the *Eltham Argus*, and then became a reporter for the *Taranaki Daily News*. His poems, meanwhile, were being accepted for publication in the *Bulletin*, and in 1933 he went to Sydney in the hope of securing a position on the *Bulletin*'s staff as a writer of light verse. When this job fell through, he went to Melbourne to work on *The Star*, before returning to Sydney to try freelance journalism. In 1934, he returned to regular work in New Zealand and self-published his first poetry collection, *Green Lions* in 1936.

In 1938, Stewart went to England. He moved in literary circles, but found it difficult to subsist as a professional writer, although he did find a London publisher for his second poetry collection, *The White Cry* (1939). He returned to Sydney, where he would remain for the rest of his life. He was employed initially as assistant to Cecil Mann, then editor of the *Bulletin*'s famous Red Page (the paper's literary section). When Mann left briefly for war service and was promoted to associate editor of the *Bulletin* on his return, Stewart took over as editor of the Red Page, where he remained for twenty years. This period was also Stewart's most productive as a writer. The impact of the war can be seen in some of his publications in the 1940s, including *Elegy for an Airman* (1940), published in a limited edition illustrated by Norman Lindsay, and dedicated to a childhood friend of Stewart's killed in combat, as well as a collection of war poems, *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* (1941). The latter collection was Stewart's first with Angus & Robertson, who would become his regular publishers. In 1945, Stewart married Margaret Coen, a painter; their only child, Meg, was born in 1948. In the decade following the end of the war, Stewart published three poetry collections with Angus & Robertson, *The Dosser in Springtime* (1946), *Sun Orchids and other poems* (1952), and *The Birdsville Track and other poems* (1955), along with an epic poem constructed as a sequence of ballads, *Glencoe* (1947), and the verse plays *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover* (1944). In 1948, he published his first book of literary criticism, *The Flesh and the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature*, and in the 1950s, extended his reputation as an editor and man of letters with the publication

of two influential and highly popular anthologies compiled in collaboration with the writer Nancy Keesing, *Australian Bush Ballads* (1955) and a revised edition of A. B. Paterson's *Old Bush Songs and Rhymes of Colonial Times* (1957). Stewart's verse play *Ned Kelly* (1943) would become one of the best known stage versions of the bushranger's story, and a widely-read work in its own right.

In 1960, Stewart was awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to Australian literature. That same year, after the *Bulletin* changed owners, Stewart moved to Angus & Robertson, where he took up a position as a literary adviser, remaining with the publisher until 1971. His last major collection of new poetry, *Rutherford and Other Poems*, appeared in 1962, and was followed by volumes of selected work: *Douglas Stewart* (1963) and *Selected Poems* (1973), and his *Collected Poems 1936-1967* (1967)- which won both the Grace Leven Poetry Prize and the Sydney Myer Award. But though he published no further collections, Stewart continued to write and publish poems in literary journals into the 1980s. After his move to Angus & Robertson, Stewart's energies as a writer and editor were channelled into a diverse range of literary pursuits. He edited a number of poetry anthologies, including *Voyager Poems* (1960), *Modern Australian Verse* (1964), *The Wide Brown Land: A New Selection of Australian Verse* (1971), and *Australia Fair: Poems and Paintings* (1974), as well as short story collections, including *Short Stories of Australia: Volume I: The Lawson Tradition* (1967), and *Best Australian Short Stories* (with Beatrice Davis, 1971). He also edited selected volumes of the work of Australian poets, including Kenneth Mackenzie (1961), 'Bellerive' [Joseph Tishler] (1961), A. D. Hope (1963), Hugh McCrae (1966). After his retirement from Angus & Robertson, Stewart wrote books of literary criticism: *The Broad Stream: Aspects of Australian Literature* (1975), *A Man of Sydney: An Appreciation of Kenneth Slessor* (1977), and *Writers of the Bulletin* (1977); memoirs, including *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir* (1975), and *Springtime in Taranaki* (1983), and contributed forewords and introductions to numerous other books. In 1970, Stewart was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).

Douglas Stewart died in Sydney on 14 February 1985. A fervent nationalist, Stewart was one of the last, and most influential, of the *Bulletin* school of poets who had such a strong impact on Australian literature in the first half of the twentieth century. In recent years, Stewart's main literary legacy has been seen as his work as an influential man of letters-his editorial work for the *Bulletin*, and advisory role for Angus & Robertson-and the support he provided from those positions for canonical Australian poets like Judith Wright, David Campbell, James McAuley, and Francis Webb. Yet Stewart was also a versatile and prolific poet in his own right. His poetry was diverse, ranging from the lyric, where he displayed a fine technical command, to the ballad form, where he was influenced both by the traditional Scottish border ballads and the Australian 'bush balladists' of the late nineteenth century, to the epic. His thematic material was similarly varied, ranging from nostalgic depictions of New Zealand and ruminations on a variety of Australian landscapes, to tragic historical events, such as the Glencoe massacre and Scott's ill-fated expedition to Antarctica.

Morning in Wellington

Thin stone is in this chill wind from the south,
Thin stone, an essence of those bleak hard hills
That bulk between the town and the cold surf.
Yes, though it gets its coldness from the sea
That snowed with moonlight, iced with foam
Antarctically glistened all night long,
This current in its planes like panes of glass
That vertically shear between black walls
Is hardened and made sour with those huge hills
As though the sharp spurs gritting through the grass
Exhale their own dank breath into the wind.

Like the lean soul of steel, like spinsters' lips
It has an acid taste, unhumanized.
I think it will be hard for the young birds
And children's lips will blue because of it.
If you had ears like mine you'd hear it now,
Bitter with a thin sound that stone might make
And icy with the far-off ocean breaking,
A cataclysm of surf with frost-toned bells,
Coldly on crag and stone and coldly on cold shells.

Morning

Move brownly now, and with a leafy rustle
Like earth's limbs slackening as sun grows warm;
Lie still, or edging to me, move as slightly
As if slow sap had snaked along your form.
A sound like twittering sticks proclaims the darling
Irresponsible joyance of the starling
That now with ecstasy, with spiralling silver
Makes shrill the sunlight's thick bee-golden swarm.

Move brownly now, acknowledge these wild matins
As stone-blue gums would do, with only a sweet
Tremor like bells in your slow secret veins.
Your lightest move, your stillness is as fleet
As trout in the far pools, as slender gums
That chafe for speed, and when a young wind comes
Jingle and stamp, and delicately stampede
Like silver deer through blue-leaved groves of heat.

The minutes brush like leaves; I dare not breathe
Lest that faint storm disturb them as they pass.
Drowse, and I'll tell you of birds like small green leaves
Pecking the yellow peaches in the grass,
The wax-eyes with their sorrowful thin cry
A leaf might make if it had will to try.
Drowse, and I'll bring you hills, and small birds trilling
Like water in a thin green reed of glass.

Move brownly now, and with a leafy rustle
Like earth's limbs slackening towards the heat.
I find in you in this warm flowering hour
That makes the night's dark loveliness complete
Not sleep, but more than sleep, a crystal dream,
A magpie like a bell in a clear stream;
Not peace, but more than peace; the noise of trees
Larks, and the auburn sibilance of wheat;

So drowse my dear with your brown leafy rustle,
While birds and bells and water keep you sweet.

Smoke Haze

So then he ran back a mile through the heat with his bucket,
Splashing too much in the dust, to that last pocket
Of bush still standing where Joe had burned the break;
And saw again there, black like a burning snake,
One fallen log still smouldering; and heard once more,
In the vast silence after the fire's red roar,
The dry leaves crack, the small gold locust scratch
Its legs together sharp as a striking match;
And felt himself, by the green upland soak
Where orange glared the sun through miles of smoke,
Trembling again in bushfire's living presence;
And watched that torch, that spear of incandescence,
Light the whole thicket with its crimson flush,
And hurled his bucket, and quenched that bottlebrush.

Reflections at a Parking Meter

One knew men changed. It was of course notorious
When drums and trumpets sounded war's first rumour
That men became the drums; or still more glorious
Dissolved into a hollow suit of armour
And so transfigured, bronze and fierce and furious,
Hacked each other to pieces without a tremor.

In peacetime too, at least upon occasion,
We saw they took an equally strange course:
All vehicles that galloped to collision,
All citizens run down without remorse,
Proved that mankind, perceived in proper vision,
Became at times a chariot or a horse.

One might have thought, since man had this propensity
For taking on the force if not appearance
Of anything he rode with such intensity,
When Stephenson invented railway engines
We would be filled right up with their immensity
And thunder down the highroads with a vengeance;

But trains by a most merciful dispensation
Lived in some hell contrived for them alone
Locked in their smoke from station straight to station,
Controlled by one black demon on his throne;
Therefore the passengers knew no temptation.
The effect on engine drivers remains unknown.

Yet maddened with their might and their persistence
Small boys were changed to trains before our eyes.
Bursting with fire and smoke and pounding pistons,
All locomotives in spirit if not in size,
They charged away and vanished in the distance;
So that what happened next should not surprise.

For once we had the car from the inventor,
The horseless carriage, then the swift tin lizzie,
Man made it, we could see, his only mentor.
There was no harm at first, the pace was easy,
The man and car joined calmly like a centaur;
But soon, as we know well, the roads went crazy.

Some saw the true position quite reversed;
The car, they said, was just a starter button
That loosed man's own fierce passions at their worst;
Fired with the chance it gave he stamped his foot on
His own accelerator in a burst

That knocked his fellows down like so much mutton.

But was this so? When walking or commuting
People were still humane in act and speech:
They could converse together without tooting,
They did not walk at sixty m.p.h.;
They moved through crowded streets without disputing,
And if they bumped, begged pardon each to each.

They did not fail to cherish their domestics,
Their cats, their dogs, their neighbours near and far:
How could they lose all human characteristics
The moment they sat down to drive a car,
And fill the press with casualty statistics
Far worse though less dramatic than in war?

There was but one true answer to the question:
Man was not wicked but his will was weak,
His mind was far too open to suggestion;
And when we filled him like a hollow tank
With power and speed and petrol in combustion
He *was* the car he drove, or so to speak.

Cars had no brains at all beneath the bonnet,
They had one driving will to go go go,
The road was theirs and while their wheels were on it
Nothing must make them turn aside or slow;
They burnt their lives out at a mile a minute;
And man, being one with them, behaved just so.

He was a kind of motive apparatus
Fixed in its place behind the steering wheel;
And, filled with his mechanical afflatus,
He could not pause, he could not think or feel.
With eyes like glaring headlamps he came at us,
The metal man, the human automobile.

To go go go became his natural function:
So cars met cars, there was no real driver,
And crashed on curves and bumped at each road junction;
Cars cursed at cars and knocked each other over,
Cars pushed through city crowds without compunction.
The wonder is that there was one survivor.

And as the cars rode shining to their fate
Quite unaware of it and their condition,
Spurning the road beneath their rubber feet,
All men bowed down to them with strange submission;
We ran to please them for they could not wait,
We leapt, we lived, we died by their permission.

Some thought we could escape from this anomaly
By preaching to the young. But if they heard,
The young were not impressed by moral homily;
And since their dads were cars, and cars their lord,
It seemed each hopeful member of the family
Was born to be a Holden or a Ford.

Faintly one hoped that man might make a car
More sympathetic to his best intentions;
A courteous car, a shy car like a deer,
A car that shrank from violence and dissensions,
A sensitive car, a car that could not bear
The sights upon the road that no one mentions.

Meantime in truth it was no laughing matter,
The traffic rushed and crashed without abatement
And man was great on earth but cars were greater.
Wherefore the poet, troubled by such treatment,
Has paused in protest by a parking meter
And switched his engine off to make this statement.

Four-Letter Words

Rejoice, all souls, I sing four-letter words,
One two three four, it is the mystic number,
None gives such pleasure as a four affords,
None stands so firm; so therefore we remember
Miss Pimm, Professor Ink, and all who latterly
Fought in the courts for four and *Lady Chatterley*.

How ludicrous it was, they argued rightly,
That five and six were always neat and clean
And you could say the strangest things politely
In synonyms of twelve or seventeen
While fours could get you jailed in conversation
Or if in print would startle the whole nation.

True the particular fours they had in mind
Were a rude Anglo-Saxon sort of noise,
For older times and rougher ways designed,
Not suitable for little girls and boys;
They seldom dropped them at the dinner table
But kept them for the pigsty or the stable.

But they were not concerned to hear them spoken,
They stood against the censorship of letters.
Should publishers be fined and authors broken
And the white Muse herself stand bound in fetters
Because they used four signs instead of three?
Were we to keep on banning *Lady C.*?

And if the words contained some impropriety
They merely told of some small natural functions
More plainly than was usual in society,
Some brief appendages and odd conjunctions
Of man and woman joined like cup and saucer,
And all were found in Rabelais and Chaucer.

How rich they glowed in those old royal sinners,
How they lit up the age-old human comedy
Like wine and mustard with their roast-beef dinners.
Our age was faint and pale: here lay the remedy,
Let the four-letter words pour out in torrents
Or cease, at least, to pester D. H. Lawrence.

Did we not reach the height of the absurd
When we could print the male for fowl or parrot
While if we used the self-same little word
To mean that amiable object like a carrot
The fat was in the fire and no mistake?

Could we not name a spade or use a rake?

This was an outrage to all human reason,
This was the death of truth, the slough of wit,
So off to court—the court was in vacation—
So off to court, when it came back to sit
Strode bold Professor Ink, and after him,
With many more, the valiant Miss Pimm.

There was a word they'd never dreamed of uttering,
Its letters reached the mystic total four.
Could they refrain when freedom's lamp was guttering
And one small breath would blow it bright once more?
While judges quailed and pressmen blessed their luck
Each one in turn pronounced the brave word ——.

They said it once they said it twice and thrice,
They jumped for joy, they made the welkin ring,
It sounded queer, it sounded rather nice;
And, what was the extraordinary thing,
In town or village, bathroom, church or bed,
All over England not a soul dropped dead.

And round the world the glorious news was rung
For though in swamps like Eire or Australia
Some fogs of ancient prejudice still clung,
The law proclaimed in pomp and full regalia
That books could now be printed, poems sung
In words direct and down to earth as dung.

Ah poor Miss Pimm and brave Professor Ink,
After a victory comes its aftermath.
On second thoughts, had they but paused to think,
Did lovers wandering down the garden path
Wish to converse in words so really awful;
And would they be such fun now they were lawful?

Shut in their libraries and calmly reading
They'd noticed some odd things but not the oddest,
Which was that when it came to actual breeding
Nature herself thought wisest to be modest;
Though she had put great pleasure in that spot
She thought when asked to face it, one might not.

With flowers, with fur, with feathers she diverted
Attention from the parts she thought uncouth;
With honey scent, with coy retreat she flirted
And never once revealed the naked truth,
Far less discussed in words the curious capers
Performed, so it is said, by stout gamekeepers.

How chastely stands the mare in the green pasture,
Her flowing tail concealing what's forbidden;
Even the stallion takes a modest posture
And keeps his mighty engine mostly hidden;
Only one creature strayed from Nature's plan,
And that was that ambitious biped man.

For when he stood up straight in evolution
And lost his fur, his shielding flanks, his tail,
We found him clad in nothing but confusion;
And that is why, since Nature must prevail,
He rushed to trousers, petticoat or pinny,
Fig-leaf, grass skirt, at least to a bikini;

And that is why, of course, when books were printed
He ran like mad from the four-letter word,
Though well content its import should be hinted.
All men wore clothes, most truly he averred,
In farms and towns, in palaces and hovels,
Yet still we stripped him naked in our novels.

What follows then when Pimm that dear good creature
And headlong Ink have leapt the age-old fences
And flown full tilt against the face of Nature?
Why, two quite unexpected consequences:
For first, no novelist can now be daring
And what is worse, they have abolished swearing.

For though concerned with truth in all its clarity
And claiming the whole human field as tillable,
Writers enjoyed a skirmish with authority
And finding some ingenious monosyllable
That meant the worst just suitably diminished:
What could they write, now all that fun was finished?

And as for swearing, can we bear its loss?
For there are times we must have Anglo-Saxon.
How can you muster sheep, describe the boss,
Or drive a car through any intersection
Without a stock of quite unprintable curses?
The editor who dares reject your verses,

The critic who condemns, if one can't call him
A simple —, or shatter his serenity
By wishing that the bluntest fate befall him
And have it ring with decent deep obscenity,
What use are things? If all the words are seen
In open print, what's left to be obscene?

And finally if we bared ourselves in books
Was not the next step bare the person too?

Then would we thus confronted with our looks
And what we were, and what we had to do,
Decide appalled we'd better do without it?
Would mankind perish? Frankly, then, I doubt it.

For novelists were far too fond of scribbling
And men of love and its attendant scandals
To let all wicked words thus cease from troubling
And, so to speak, completely drop their bundles.
Never would they agree a court had docked them
Of their old right of peeping at what shocked them.

They would invent some new five-letter word
For any rude protuberance or cavity
Or find some synonym to be abhorred
Not noticed heretofore with proper gravity;
Or best of all in this absurd position
Quite simply disregard the court's decision.

So after all raise up the solemn anthem
For Pimm and Ink and all their bold array;
They really did no harm, all men must grant them,
They cleared the path for some new Rabelais.
And but for their brave stand in far-off Britain
This poem, save the mark, had not been written.

A Summer Dusk

So white, so slight a breath could snuff you out,
What have you but yourself, pale wavering flame,
To light you through the woods when darkness comes?

With silver bells on saffron reins the gums
Are jingling in the harness of the sun,
And you as they the dusk may dare to flout,

For candleflames are drowned in day's blue drought,
Their weakness hid: and yet when light is done
What have you but yourself, pale wavering flame?

Night that reveals you gently as the moon,
Heightens and whitens now your flute, your beauty,
And yet the creamy moonrise of your limbs,

Gathering in radiance as the landscape dims
From saffron and silver, bells and leaves and light,
And the blue thunder of the drums of noon,

Too cruelly shows you utterly alone,
Frail through the dangerous undertone of night
A moon, a flame, white wavering flute of beauty.

If you could bring your liliated flute of flame
Closer towards the campfire of my heart,
You would be lost and safe again, and see

That skulking shaggy monster, kin to me,
Who roves all dusks and smells of earth and fur
Half leave the shadows, tell us half his name.

And you would see dark trees grown swiftly tame
Like wild black mares with crimsoned manes astir
Drink deep the pool of fire you call my heart.

Come close, beloved, for the black wind swirls,
The fire burns low, as quick as candles melt,
And lonely in the shadows is your flute.

You have yourself alone to light your route,
Pale liliated flame, white wavering flute of light,
And in dark woods a dark wind wails and whirls

And I have seen the bodies of young girls
As smooth as candles, as slender and as white,
Go shrivelling into age as candles melt,

And their gold faces gutter and go out,
And their gold faces gutter and go out.

Heart of the World

I feel now like some mariner who lies
Too tired for sleep upon his narrow bed,
While overhead
The stars are crackling in the glimmering skies,
And sea beneath is ebony fired with green.
While so he lies, so utterly serene,
He hears the engines beat,
Thud and repeat,
In perfect rhythm, in lovely shuddering time.
Their steady rhyme
Seems far below him, far away
In some vast chasm ... a great machine
Throbbing and throbbing, far away.

And so upon your warm white breast I lie
In utter peace, in rich abandonment.
O heart content!
There is no terror in the sputtering sky
Nor in the oily bay that's stabbed with green.
Now while I lie, your heart beats quick and keen;
I hear it darkly pound,
Thud and resound,
In perfect rhythm, in lovely shuddering time.
Its steady rhyme
Seems far below me, far away
In reeling space ... a great machine
Throbbing and throbbing, far away.

Perceived in Chill and Windy Dusk

Perceived in chill and windy dusk
Night's dark demand of tears and blood,
And still the ghost assumes my form
To freeze the heat of body's mood.
Too calm for touch or terror still,
Aloof and cool as streams at night,
He stands within my body's frame
With flesh of cold and yellow light;
As once he stood when two were parted,
A pillar of cold yellow light
Unmoved through silver storms of tears
And blood and anguish in the night;
As he will stand within my flesh
In sun or storm, in calm or flood,
To still with chill and yellow light
Life's dark demand of tears and blood.

Windy Night

You foolish wind,
You rush and you blow
All the dark night
Outside my window.

Love is more wise,
It falls to rest
When the wild breath subsides
After the tempest.

Blow, then, you restless,
Make softer and deep
The hollow of quiet
Where my love lies asleep.

The Dreaming World

(A Sonnet Sequence)

1 [Because the world is asleep and no one can break]

Because the world is asleep and no one can break
Into her misty dream where her trees proclaim
Her dark-green will, and daffodils will not speak
The pure yellow word that broods on their lips like flame,
We who have chosen to wake, we who have chosen
To work in words have learned that we wasted our breath:
Our hands drop down to our sides and our lips are frozen,
And we learn in silence the speech of sleep and death.

The dark world stirs in her sleep with a wave of branches,
The thrush in the mist cries out like a girl awaking,
And the stream by the willow whose timeless thirst it quenches
Is one with the leaves above it gleaming and shaking;
And I touch the tree with my hand and speak to the stream
In a silence of ice and silver, like the babble of dream.

2 [In the grassy street of the suburb the black dog drowns]

In the grassy street of the suburb the black dog drowns,
Shrill children play, and neighbour gossips to neighbour,
And deep in the dream of their hearts the little houses
Are anchored in peace like hulks in the calm of the harbour.
And now in a flood of sunlight at Double Bay
Where the boats are white on the water and gulls in the air,
The buildings crowd to a tower, and the primitive clay
Is a man's dream struck out of earth, all golden and fair.

What deep dream, softer than feathers, greener than grass,
More sparkling than water, stirs in the sleeping earth,
That the trees, calm apparitions, should tower and pass,
And out of her need the daffodils come to birth:
All the green world, the shining phantasy, lies
In the mind of the earth, in her sweet dark hidden eyes.

3 [At the end of the town where the road's cold, rocky river]

At the end of the town where the road's cold, rocky river
Is sucked in the breakers of endless acres of green,
A rill runs out of the swamp where the bulrushes shiver
And trills through the rusty weeds so sparkling and clean
A bird could have sung it instead of that marshy place.
Flat on his belly the boy by the crystal pool
Stares at the water as at a beloved face
And all his mind is suddenly shining and cool.

Under the blackberry sticks on its way to the wood

The Mangatoki twists like a silver chain
And winds in my mind and glitters and sings in my blood,
And the water has spoken, the man has answered again:
Delight to delight its clear salutation tells,
Talking in water as churches talk in bells.

4 [Perched on the wrinkled cherry the starling quivers]

Perched on the wrinkled cherry the starling quivers
And snaps his bright bill seeking a keener song,
And down at the garden end the flax-bush shivers
In its glory of honey and fire where all day long
The restless black bells of the tuis are swaying and singing.
And a child on the swing there sings to herself alone,
And neither the scarlet flowers nor the bird-songs ringing
Nor any rill in its cress has so pure a tone.

On the calm air the child's pure being breaks
In a white enchantment of song from the flute of her lips;
And the wrinkled tree and the starling, the blossoming flax
And the tui whose voice is gold with the honey it sips
Are as close to the child as her voice, more close than her name,
Speaking one shining language of song and flame.

5 [Moira threw back her head and cried out my name]

Moira threw back her head and cried out my name,
And the white birds of her breasts and the swing of her thighs
Rushed into furthest dark, out of space, out of time,
And we cried to each other there with iron cries,
Lords of a kingdom not known to men awake.
And afterwards in the dreaming earth of lovers
Our calm delight enfolded like a lake
The shade of trees and the cool thrust of rivers.

After the fury, in love's clear midnight sky
My shadows blaze with stars and like a ship
Spreading her sails of light the moon goes by,
And I can taste all waters at your lip
And touch all forests in shade of hair and limb,
And live most richly then when life's most dim.

6 [Sometimes as when the bewildering surf of snow]

Sometimes as when the bewildering surf of snow
Like a frozen thunder beat on our quiet lands
And changed the earth so nowhere was good to go,
All that we know, all we can touch with our hands
Turns on us, mocks us, drives us home to the hearth,
To the lonely heart where the blood like firelight moves.
The cattle, lost like children, search for their earth;
The whiteness is wild as earthquake under their hooves.

This is the time when your knock like a roar of rock

Clatters the neighbour's house where the fire was warm,
And a stranger, a dead man, breathes behind the lock,
And will not open, and sends you away in the storm.
This is the time when a man is so much alone
His friend is a madman, his girl is a hag of the moon.

7 [This is the man who entertains us each morning]

This is the man who entertains us each morning,
Collapsed on the path and feebly moving his hands
Till the ambulance comes with its shriek of despair and warning
And the crowd "moves on" at the constable's terse commands.
This is the man who stays in no man's mind
And is whisked to the dark while the driver is still explaining
The clear manoeuvres of fate, the Braille of the blind,
To the constable's book and the hopeful idlers remaining.

Who if not you, who if not I is this,
Stricken by terrible chance to be one in a city?
The workman high up, the scream hurtling down the abyss,
The twitching white face the Judge commends to God's pity,
The headline, the photograph: who if not you, if not I
For whom all young girls yearn, all mothers sigh?

8 [The evening holds in its hand the darkening cloud]

The evening holds in its hand the darkening cloud
And the fig-tree, wide as a forest, stretching its branches,
And the soldier asleep, and the far-off roar of the crowd,
And the harbour grave with dusk, and the anchored launches.
On the slope of the evening turning towards the night
The soldier is one with the leafy shadows heaping
And the quiet grey water that mirrors the seagull's flight,
And the girl in his arms is the spring wind curled and sleeping.

Now his heart is loud like the far-off crowd in his ears.
O soldier, hold your girl close in your leafy smother,
For not in your lifetime, not in these thundering years
Will grass be your sister again and rock be your brother
And your spirit be still with delight as a wheatfield at noon.
The evening is closing its hand. The night comes soon.

9 [Turning towards the night like a turning sleeper]

Turning towards the night like a turning sleeper
The world is moving with all its darkening dreams
Into a dream so immeasurably deeper
That stars are pebbles and time and space are streams
And the racing waters cry out in words of light.
The boy could sing with the rill in the golden summer,
But who in the crash and blaze of starry night
Can fill his throat with the towering cry of its dreamer?

Yet I have stood at evening and watched the world,

With the slow grace of a pebble in water, sink
In the great dream. And space closed over and swirled.
And drinking the silence upon that silver brink
My stillness welled to a cry I could not speak—
So sweet was the dream—for fear the dreamer wake.

DAVID CAMPBELL

1915 – 1979

David Watt Ian Campbell was born on 16 July 1915 at Ellerslie station, near Adelong, in the Monaro District of the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, the third child of a grazier and medical doctor, Alfred Campbell, and his wife Edith Madge (née Watt). From 1930 he attended The King's School in Sydney, where, he would later claim, he devoted much of his time to playing football, though he also wrote some early poetry. He went on to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he represented England in Rugby Union, and took his B.A. in English in 1937. He returned to Australia in 1938 and at the outbreak of the Second World War joined the Royal Australian Air Force, serving as a flying boat pilot throughout the War, mainly in Australia's North and in New Guinea against the Japanese, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1943. While serving in the Air Force, he began contributing poems to the *Bulletin*, a number of which were published through the war years, including his celebrated war poem "Men in Green".

After the war, Campbell took up farming on a family property near Canberra. His first book of verse, *Speak with the Sun*, which contained many of his early contributions to the *Bulletin*, was published in 1949. He would go on to publish over fifteen volumes of poetry and prose. He was poetry editor of *The Australian* newspaper in 1964–65, and from 1973 to 1976 held a senior fellowship of the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. He was the recipient of a number of prestigious literary awards, including the Henry Lawson Australian Arts Award (1970), the Patrick White Literary Award (1975), and (posthumously) the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Christopher Brennan Award. He won the Grace Leven Poetry Prize twice, for his *Selected Poems 1942–1968* (in 1968), and *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (in 1980) – the latter book also won the NSW Premier's Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry in 1980. Campbell was the posthumous subject of a special issue of *Poetry Australia* in December 1981. He died at Canberra on 29 July 1979.

Campbell started out as a poet of the local landscape, and a member of a group of poets Vincent Buckley termed the 'New Bulletin School,' writing lyric poetry in a style that owed something to the 'bush ballad' tradition of Australian pastoral and vernacular verse. Responsive to changes in Australian society in the late 1960s, Campbell unexpectedly changed to a looser form of versification and more contemporary themes with an occasional slightly surreal tone, and became friendly with a younger generation of poets including Michael Dransfield and Martin Johnston. His 1970 poem 'My Lai', about an infamous massacre of Vietnamese villagers by US forces, clearly expressed his attitude of opposition to Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam. The experimental tone of some of his later poems owed something to work with translations of Russian poetry, a collaborative project with Rosemary Dobson and others.

Dawn Song

Now Dawn gets up as blond as birds,
The lucky man she marries
Will save a fortune on her dress
For wives discard with nakedness
A pretty pile of worries.

Just slap her in a spider-web
And never pay the spider;
Though he sits soaping like a Jew,
He'll get no more than's overdue
On guernseys for Godiva.

At foot she's ninety Leicester lambs,
Her soloists are thrushes
Who simply for a song arrange
Quotations from the stock-exchange
And sing them in the bushes.

But should these rural sophistries
Set men of business yawning,
She'll kiss her fingers once and say,
Good morning. Till another day—
But not before the morning.

Morning Rise

The black sally-tree
On the horizon
Holds in its net
A cloud and a star
As we rise at dawn.

Day like a sleeper
Wakes on the water,
Stars change to bird-song:
Pretty, pretty; pretty, pretty:
Reed warbler to honeyeater
In the white-sally
In the glass of the river;
The brake of teal wings.
All this gladness at awaking!

Sky and glass split.
In a vortex, I ...
I have caught
The sun in a net—pretty,
Pretty, in all this gladness—
Like the black-sally.

Speak with the Sun

From a wreck of tree in the wash of night
Glory, glory, sings the bird;
Across ten thousand years of light
His creative voice is heard.

Wide on a tide of wind are set
Warp and woof of silvered air;
But the song slips through the net
To where the myriad galaxies are.

And to the heartbeats of the light,
Now from the deepness of the glade
Well up the bubbles of delight:
Of such stuff the stars were made.

Dance of Flame and Shadow

Caliban Chorus

All who walk in the sun's light
Throw a shadow. Of a shade,
Hooded angel of the hush,
Are these leaping terrors made
That dance upon the walls of flesh.

You have done and left undone.
Let the briar but pluck the sleeve,
And naked on the precipice
See the modest take their leave,
Snap a thread and come to this.

Snap a thread and come to this:
If the images that bless
Fade like mirage on the air,
Stepping through the looking-glass
Pause and leave a shadow there.

Who set the hearth within the heart,
Candles winking in the mind
To book and bedtime children? Ask
The ape behind the window-blind,
The murderer in the comic mask.

Here and there was shadows greet,
Doze and shuffle, hang like poor
Relations on a strap of breath
And bolt our pie-crust at the door
Who fear the rag-and-bone-man, truth.

Perceptions

Give me that moon to swing the door
And let the bird's wild honey in
And I will tell philosophers
How they came by tongue and ear.

Give me the stars, give me the night,
And I will show what senses are:
A spirit seeking clarity
Builds with lonely cells of light.

Give me sweet clarity of mind
And stars are crystals, thumbnail views
Elsewhere as flowers, that overflow
And fill horizons like the wind.

The Heart of the Matter

Plodding physicists agree
That matter equals energy;
Energy is sweet delight,
Says Blake, and puts the matter right.

Stars and singing birds rejoice
In their courses with one voice
And from the dreaming atom grows
The chain-reaction of the rose.

Matter would take fire without
The channelling restraints of Thought
That lock wild ardours up in stone
To lend his concepts flesh and bone.

Stars and singing birds rejoice
In their courses with one voice
And from the dangerous atom grows
The thorny passion of the rose.

Eternity

This moment chiselled out in stone
Or graven on the plate of rhyme
Would seem more permanent than bone,
An asset in the vault of time.

But when this stone is desert sand,
The key of this dead language lost—
Perdurable, this moment's brand
On living bone will be embossed.

Mirage

The drought continued. By a waterhole
He played the shepherd: as the geese came in,
His kelpie staged the mob out and he'd skin
The green and dying, choosing on the whole
These tasks to silence. Not meeting with a soul
For so long, only dread and discipline
And water-birds stood friends or he'd begin
Yarning with his lean shadow. But control
Snapped when the horseman rode down from the skies
To amble through the gentle dust. In half
A second he was saddled; to his surprise
The other bolted; by a rocky shelf
He wheeled him, and in those inquiring eyes
He faced what he had come to find, himself.

Wind

Wind hurries through the
Dark like fear, tearing
Its thin skin on briars,
Lurching into houses.
Birds catch in its hair.

The wind is boneless
Dark air. The trees
Have their own ailments,
Houses their lives to live. Hills
Cornered, bare bleak stone.

What is all the hurry
Wind? A date with a dustman or
Itch with a conscience
Peering down chimneys, caught in corners,
Trying lockers and drawers?

The wind can't sleep. The bed-
Springs need oiling. They
Coil in the mattress waiting
To spring through in houses
People used to call home.

Looking Down on Canberra

No doubt the world is carrying on
For Canberra groans in purple haze,
Yet it is good, these autumn days,

Sitting among the hills alone,
To watch a spider thread a stone
And listen while the mountain jays
Fill the distances with praise—
And every web and song their own.
The thousand voices of the town,
The worn phrase, the ruined word,
In this clear mountain silence drown,
Leaving the sweet song of a bird
And coupled stone. Yes, it is good
To think and sing in solitude.

Men in Green

There were fifteen men in green,
Each with a tommy-gun,
Who leapt into my plane at dawn;
We rose to meet the sun.

Our course lay to the east. We climbed
Into the break of day,
Until the jungle far beneath
Like a giant fossil lay.

We climbed towards the distant range
Where two white paws of cloud
Clutched at the shoulders of the pass.
The green men laughed aloud.

They did not fear the ape-like cloud
That climbed the mountain crest
And rode the currents of the air
And hid the pass in mist.

They did not fear the summer's sun
In whose hot centre lie
A hundred hissing cannon shells
For the unwatchful eye.

And when at Dobadura we
Set down, each turned to raise
His thumb towards the open sky
In mockery and praise.

But fifteen men in jungle green
Rose from the kunai grass
To come aboard, and my green men
In silence watched them pass:
It seemed they looked upon themselves
In a prophetic glass.

There were some leaned on a stick
And some on stretchers lay,
But few walked on their own two feet
In the early green of day.

They had not feared the ape-like cloud
That climbed the mountain crest;
They had not feared the summer's sun
With bullets for their breast.

Their eyes were bright, their looks were dull,
Their skin had turned to clay.
Nature had met them in the night
And stalked them in the day.

And I think still of men in green
On the Soputa track
With fifteen spitting tommy-guns
To keep a jungle back.

JOHN MANIFOLD

1915-1985

John Streeter Manifold, 1915-1985, was born in Melbourne and educated at Geelong Grammar School and Cambridge University. After graduating with a degree in modern languages (French and German), he worked as an editor-translator for a German publisher. With the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to England and served in British army intelligence.

Manifold joined the Communist Party while at Cambridge and on his return to Australia with his English wife in 1949 he settled in Brisbane, Queensland and became active in the cultural and political life of the Party. He helped found the Realist Writers Group in 1950 and worked extensively in the teaching and performance of music, the manufacture of instruments and the collection and publication of Australian ballads and folk music. His publications in this area include *Who Wrote the Ballads?: Notes on Australian Folksong* (1954), *The Violin, the Banjo and the Bones: An Essay on the Instruments of Bush Music* (1957) and, as editor, the *Queensland Centenary Pocket Songbook* (1959) and the *Penguin Australian Song Book* (1964).

Manifold published his poems and verse translations in a wide variety of journals and magazines; his collections of verse include *Verses 1930-1933* (1933), *The Death of Ned Kelly and Other Ballads* (1941), *Selected Verse* (1946), *Nightmares and Sunhorses* (1961), *Op 8* (1971), *Collected Verse* (1971) and *On My Selection* (1983) which included some new work.

Guess Who?

From billabong or pond
he serenades the moon
upon his small bassoon;
the moon does not respond
but in the hope she might
he keeps it up all night.

The meatworker in magpie suit
goes home and practices his flute
ten times on end he will begin
the Bridal March from Lohengrin,
or make the Kookaburra smile
by his attempts at Fairest Isle.

He needs both industry and skill
to satisfy his hunger
did he run up that monstrous bill
of his at the fishmonger?

In arrogance and outward show
but not in brains he's strong;
olive above and white below
with either eye a crimson glow
he's waiting here, for figs to grow
upon a currajong
in intellect no less than colour
the female bird is even duller.

1. Bull Frog
2. Butcher-Bird
3. Pelican
4. Fig Bird

Folk

They've opened a Folk Espresso Bar,
and once, for a sort of a joke,
I went to drink Folk Espresso there
and watch the Espresso Folk.

The coffee was just the same old stuff
as you get in the posh caffays,
but something about the customers
recalled my Grandpa's days.

They had flowing beards and flowing manes,
Tho' they looked a bit down-at-heels,
and they sang to Moody-Sankey tunes
of their wonderful high ideals.

The girls had hair like my Grandma wore,
and stockings like Aunt Georgette,
and it seemed quite clear that they hadn't heard
of the daily bath as yet.

If it hadn't have been for the atmosphere
I'd never have done such a thing,
but I went right up to the rostrum-place
and said I should like to sing.

I couldn't locate the Pianist,
but I gave 'em the old Lost Chord -
"Seated one day at the whats-his-name"
and golly, how they encored!

One of them wanted to tape my voice
on a little machine he had,
and others told me I was unique
and my song was authentic trad.

So I'm studying hard to change my voice
to the right American row,
and growing a beard, for I mean to sing
as a Folk Professional now.

The Tomb of Lt John Learmonth, AIF

This is not sorrow, this is work:
I build a cairn of words over a silent man,
My friend John Learmonth whom the Germans killed.
There was no word of hero in his plan;
Verse should have been his love and peace his trade,
But history turned him to a partisan.

Far from the battle as his bones are laid
Crete will remember him. Remember well,
Mountains of Crete, the Second Field Brigade!

Say Crete, and there is little more to tell
Of muddle tall as treachery, despair
And black defeat resounding like a bell;

But bring the magnifying focus near
And in contempt of muddle and defeat
The old heroic virtues still appear.

Australian blood where hot and icy meet
(James Hogg and Lermontov were of his kin)
Lie still and fertilise the fields of Crete.

Schoolboy, I watched his ballading begin:
Billy and bullocky and billabong,
Our properties of childhood, all were in.

I heard the air though not the undersong,
The fierceness and resolve; but all the same
They're the tradition, and tradition's strong.

Swagman and bushranger die hard, die game,
Die fighting, like that wild colonial boy –
Jack Dowling, says the ballad, was his name.

He also spun his pistol like a toy,
Turned to the hills like wolf or kangaroo,
And faced destruction with a bitter joy.

His freedom gave him nothing else to do
But set his back against his family tree
And fight the better for the fact he knew

He was as good as dead. Because the sea
Was closed and the air dark and the land lost,
'They'll never capture me alive,' said he.

That's courage chemically pure, uncrossed
With sacrifice or duty or career,
Which counts and pays in ready coin the cost

Of holding course. Armies are not its sphere
Where all's contrived to achieve its counterfeit;
It swears with discipline, it's volunteer.

I could as hardly make a moral fit
Around it as around a lightning flash.
There is no moral, that's the point of it,

No moral. But I'm glad of this panache
That sparkles, as from flint, from us and steel,
True to no crown nor presidential sash

Nor flag nor fame. Let others mourn and feel
He died for nothing: nothings have their place.
While thus the kind and civilised conceal

This spring of unsuspected inward grace
And look on death as equals, I am filled
With queer affection for the human race.

The Bunyip and the Whistling Kettle

I knew a most superior camper
Whose methods were absurdly wrong,
He did not live on tea and damper
But took a little stove along.

And every place he came to settle
He spread with gadgets saving toil,
He even had a whistling kettle
To warn him it was on the boil.

Beneath the waratahs and wattles,
Boronia and coolibah,
He scattered paper, cans and bottles,
And parked his nasty little car.

He camped, this sacrilegious stranger
(The moon was at the full that week),
Once in a spot that teemed with danger
Beside a bunyip-haunted creek.

He spread his junk but did not plunder,
Hoping to stay the weekend long;
He watched the bloodshot sun go under
Across the silent billabong.

He ate canned food without demurring,
He put the kettle on for tea.
He did not see the water stirring
Far out beside a sunken tree.

Then, for the day had made him swelter
And night was hot and tense to spring,
He donned a bathing-suit in shelter,
And left the firelight's friendly ring.

He felt the water kiss and tingle.
He heard the silence—none too soon!
A ripple broke against the shingle,
And dark with blood it met the moon.

Abandoned in the hush, the kettle
Screamed as it guessed its master's plight,
And loud it screamed, the lifeless metal,
Far into the malicious night.

JUDITH WRIGHT

1915 – 2000

Judith Arundell Wright (31 May 1915 – 26 June 2000) was an Australian poet, environmentalist and campaigner for Aboriginal land rights.

Judith Wright was a prolific Australian poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than 50 books. Wright was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. She believed that the poet should be concerned with national and social problems. At the age of 85, just before her death, she attended in Canberra at a march for reconciliation with Aboriginal people.

*Rhyme, my old cymbal,
I don't clash you as often,
or trust your old promises
music and unison.
I used to love Keats, Blake;
now I try haiku
for its honed brevities,
its inclusive silences.
(from 'Brevity' in Notes at Edge)*

Judith Arundell Wright was born near Armidale, New South Wales, into an old and wealthy pastoral family. Wright was raised on her family's sheep station. After her mother died in 1927, she was educated under her grandmother's supervision. At the age of 14 she was sent to New England Girls' School, where she found consolation from poetry and decided to become a poet. In 1934 she entered at Sydney University. Wright studied philosophy, history, psychology and English, without taking a degree.

When Wright was in her 20s, she started to become progressively deaf. Between the years 1937 and 1938 Wright travelled in Britain and Europe. She then worked as a secretary-stenographer and clerk until 1944. From 1944 to 1948 she was a university statistician at the University of Queensland, St. Lucia. At the age of 30 Wright met her lifelong partner, the unorthodox philosopher J.P. McKinney, 23 years her senior; they later married.

Most of Wright's poetry was written in the mountains of southern Queensland. Protesting the political policies of Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Premier of Queensland, Wright left her home state in the mid-1970s, and settled to a remote property near the heritage town of Braidwood, south of Canberra, where she wrote many of her later nature poems.

During her career as a writer, Wright did not reject to produce hack work, school plays for Australian Broadcasting Commission and children's books, for her living. She lectured part-time at various Australian universities. In 1975 she collected her addresses and speeches in *Because I was Invited*. Wright was appointed a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and an emeritus professorship of the Literature Board of the Arts Council of Australia. Wright's memoir, *Half a Lifetime*, covered her life until the 1960s, and appeared in 2000. Wright died of a heart attack in Canberra on June 26 at the age of 85. Her

ashes were scattered around the mountain cemetery of Tamborine Mountain. Wright had owned a strip of rainforest nearby, which she donated to the state so it could be preserved as a national park.

Wright started to publish poems in the late 1930s in literary journals. As a poet she made her debut with *The Moving Image* (1946), in which she showed her technical excellence without burdens of fashionable trends. Most of the poems were written in wartime - in 'The Trains' Wright took the threat of the war in the Pacific as a subject. The main theme in the volume was the poet's awareness of time, death, and evil on a universal scale. With the following collections Wright gained a reputation as a wholly new voice in literature with a distinctly female perspective. The title poem from *Woman to Man* (1949) dealt with the sexual act from a woman's point of view. 'The Maker' paralleled the creation of a poem and the creation of a child. Several of her early poems such as 'Bullocky' and 'Woman to Man' became standard anthology pieces. Wright also wrote love poems to her husband. His death in 1966 and her increasing anxiety of the destruction of the natural environment brought more pessimistic undercurrents in her work.

*I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust
the drying creek, the furious animal,
that they oppose us still;
that we are ruined by the thing we kill.
(from 'Australia 1970')*

Wright's poetry was inspired by the various regions in which she lived: the New England, New South Wales, the subtropical rainforests of Tamborine Mountain, Queensland, and the plains of the southern highlands near Braidwood. A new period in Wright's life started in the mid-1950s: "The two threads of my life, the love of the land itself and the deep unease over the fate of its original people, were beginning to twine together, and the rest of my life would be influenced by that connection." In *The Two Faces* (1955) she took Hiroshima as an example of man's power to destroy even the cycles of nature. Wright's activism on conservation issues led her to focus on the interaction between land and the language. According to Wright, "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live." She started to see that her mission was to find words and poetic forms to bridge the human experience and the natural world, man and earth. "Poetry needs a background in which emotional, as well as material values are given their due weight; and the effect of this shallowness of roots is easily traceable in Australian writing, with its uneasy attempts to solve or to ignore the problem of its attitude to the country." Alienation from the land meant for Wright crisis of the language. She criticized the education system for failing to teach students the pleasures of poetry, and promoted the reading and writing of poetry in schools. Realistically she also expressed doubts about the power of poetry to change the scheme of things.

In the early 1960s Wright helped to found Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland. She fought to conserve the Great Barrier Reef, when its ecology was threatened by oil drilling, and campaigned against sand mining on Fraser Island. In her passionate poem 'Australia 1970' Wright expressed her feelings of disappointment and anger, seeing her wild country die, "like the eaglehawk, dangerous till the last breath's gone, clawing and striking." *The Coral Battleground* (1977) was her account of the campaign to protect the "great water-gardens, lovely indeed as cherry boughs and flowers under the once clear sea." In *The Cry for the*

Dead (1981) Wright examined the treatment of Aborigines and destruction of the environment by settlers in Central Queensland from the 1840s to the 1920s.

As a literary critic Wright enjoyed a high reputation, and edited several collections of Australian verse. She was a friend of Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose work Wright helped her to get published. *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965) was Wright's pioneering effort to reread such early Australian poets as Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon, and Henry Kendall.

Wright received several awards, including Grace Leven Prize (1950), Australia-Britannica Award (1964), Robert Frost Memorial Award (1977), Australian World Prize (1984), Queen's Medal for Poetry (1992). She had honorary degrees from several universities. In 1973-74 she was a member of Australia Council.

Her work is noted for a keen focus on the Australian environment, which began to gain prominence in Australian art in the years following World War II. She deals with the relationship between settlers, Indigenous Australians and the bush, among other themes. Wright's aesthetic centres on the relationship between mankind and the environment, which she views as the catalyst for poetic creation. Her images characteristically draw from the Australian flora and fauna, yet contain a mythic substrata that probes at the poetic process, limitations of language, and the correspondence between inner existence and objective reality.

Wright was well known for her campaigning in support of the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Island. With some friends, she helped found one of the earliest nature conservation movements.

She was also an impassioned advocate for the Aboriginal land rights movement. Tom Shapcott, reviewing *With Love and Fury*, her posthumous collection of selected letters published in 2007, comments that her letter on this topic to the Australian Prime Minister John Howard was "almost brutal in its scorn". Shortly before her death, she attended a march in Canberra for reconciliation between non-indigenous Australians and the Aboriginal people.

Judith Wright died in Canberra on 26 June 2000, aged 85.

Five Senses

Now my five senses
gather into a meaning
all acts, all presences;
and as a lily gathers
the elements together,
in me this dark and shining,
that stillness and that moving,
these shapes that spring from nothing,
become a rhythm that dances,
a pure design.

While I'm in my five senses
they send me spinning
all sounds and silences,
all shape and colour
as thread for that weaver,
whose web within me growing
follows beyond my knowing
some pattern sprung from nothing-
a rhythm that dances
and is not mine.

Magpies

Along the road the magpies walk
with hands in pockets, left and right.
They tilt their heads, and stroll and talk.
In their well-fitted black and white.

They look like certain gentlemen
who seem most nonchalant and wise
until their meal is served - and then
what clashing beaks, what greedy eyes!

But not one man that I have heard
throws back his head in such a song
of grace and praise - no man nor bird.
Their greed is brief; their joy is long.
For each is born with such a throat
as thanks his God with every note.

Lyrebirds

Over the west side of the mountain,
that's lyrebird country.
I could go down there, they say, in the early morning,
and I'd see them, I'd hear them.

Ten years, and I have never gone.
I'll never go.
I'll never see the lyrebirds -
the few, the shy, the fabulous,
the dying poets.

I should see them, if I lay there in the dew:
first a single movement
like a waterdrop falling, then stillness,
then a brown head, brown eyes,
a splendid bird, bearing
like a crest the symbol of his art,
the high symmetrical shape of the perfect lyre.
I should hear that master practising his art.

No, I have never gone.
Some things ought to be left secret, alone;
some things – birds like walking fables –
ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the
heart.

Oppositions

Today I was caught alone in a summer storm
counting heartbeats from flash to crash of thunder.

From a small plane once I looked down a cliff of cloud.
Like God to Moses, it exploded into instructions

Home, a yellow frog on the shower-pipe
startled my hand and watched me as I watch lightning.

Frog, my towel is wet, my hair dripping,
but you don't for such reasons take me to be a refuge.

Small damp peaceful sage with a loony grin.
("one minute of sitting, one inch of Buddha") [1]

a long time back we clambered up the shore
and learned to play with fire. Now there's no stopping us.

Back to the drainpipe, frog, don't follow me.
I'm off to dry my hair by the radiator.

I can't believe that wine's warm solaces
don't help the searcher: the poet on the wineshop floor

was given his revelations. The hermit of Cold Mountain
laughs as loudly perhaps — I choose fire, not snow.

[1]... Manran (1635—1714)

All things conspire

All things conspire to hold me from you –
even my love,
since that would mask you and unname you
till merely woman and man we live.
All men wear arms against the rebel –
and they are wise,
since the sound world they know and stable
is eaten away by lovers' eyes.
All things conspire to stand between us –
even you and I,
who still command us, still unjoin us,
and drive us forward till we die.
Not till those fiery ghosts are laid
shall we be one.
Till then, they whet our double blade
and use the turning world for stone.

Naked Girl and Mirror

This is not I. I had no body once-
only what served my need to laugh and run
and stare at stars and tentatively dance
on the fringe of foam and wave and sand and sun.
Eyes loved, hands reached for me, but I was gone
on my own currents, quicksilver, thistledown.
Can I be trapped at last in that soft face?

I stare at you in fear, dark brimming eyes.
Why do you watch me with that immoderate plea-
'Look under these curled lashes, recognize
that you were always here; know me-be me.'
Smooth once-hermaphrodite shoulders, too tenderly
your long slope runs, above those sudden shy
curves furred with light that spring below your space.

No, I have been betrayed. If I had known
that this girl waited between a year and a year,
I'd not have chosen her bough to dance upon.
Betrayed, by that little darkness here, and here
this swelling softness and that frightened stare
from eyes I will not answer; shut out here
from my own self, by its new body's grace-

for I am betrayed by someone lovely. Yes,
I see you are lovely, hateful naked girl.
Your lips in the mirror tremble as I refuse
to know or claim you. Let me go-let me be gone.
You are half of some other who may never come.
Why should I tend you? You are not my own;
you seek that other-he will be your home.

Yet I pity your eyes in the mirror, misted with tears;
I lean to your kiss. I must serve you; I will obey.
Some day we may love. I may miss your going, some day,
though I shall always resent your dumb and fruitful years.
Your lovers shall learn better, and bitterly too,
if their arrogance dares to think I am part of you.

Failure of Communion

What is the space between,
enclosing us in one
united person, yet
dividing each alone.

Frail bridges cross from eye
to eye, from flesh to flesh,
from word to word: the net
is gapped at every mesh,

and this each human knows:
however close our touch
or intimate our speech,
silences, spaces reach
most deep, and will not close.

The Sisters

In the vine-shadows on the veranda;
under the yellow leaves, in the cooling sun,
sit two sisters. Their slow voices run
like little winter creeks, dwindled by frost and wind,
and the square of sunlight moves on the veranda.

They remember the gay young men on their tall horses
who came courting; the dancing and the smells of leather
and wine, the girls whispering by the fire together;
even their dolls and ponies, all they have left behind
moves in the yellow shadows on the veranda.

Thinking of their lives apart and the men they married
thinking of the marriage-bed and the birth of their first child,
they look down smiling. "My life was wide and wild,
and who can know my heart? There in that golden jungle
I walk alone," say the old sisters on the veranda.

To a Child

When I was a child I saw
a burning bird in a tree.
I see became I am,
I am became I see.

In winter dawns of frost
the lamp swung in my hand.
The battered moon on the slope
lay like a dune of sand;

and in the trap at my feet
the rabbit leapt and prayed,
weeping blood, and crouched
when the light shone on the blade.

The sudden sun lit up
the webs from wire to wire;
the white webs, the white dew,
blazed with a holy fire.

Flame of light in the dew,
flame of blood on the bush
answered the whirling sun
and the voice of the early thrush.

I think of this for you.
I would not have you believe
the world is empty of truth
or that men must grieve,

but hear the song of the martyrs
out of a bush of fire-
'All is consumed with love;
all is renewed with desire.'

Woman to Child

You who were darkness warmed my flesh
where out of darkness rose the seed.
Then all a world I made in me;
all the world you hear and see
hung upon my dreaming blood.

There moved the multitudinous stars,
and coloured birds and fishes moved.
There swam the sliding continents.
All time lay rolled in me, and sense,
and love that knew not its beloved.

O node and focus of the world;
I hold you deep within that well
you shall escape and not escape-
that mirrors still your sleeping shape;
that nurtures still your crescent cell.

I wither and you break from me;
yet though you dance in living light
I am the earth, I am the root,
I am the stem that fed the fruit,
the link that joins you to the night.

Woman to Man

The eyeless labourer in the night,
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,
builds for its resurrection day---
silent and swift and deep from sight
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;
this has no name to name it by;
yet you and I have known it well.
This is our hunter and our chase,
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,
the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
This is the blood's wild tree that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;
this is the question and reply;
the blind head butting at the dark,
the blaze of light along the blade.
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

The Surfer

He thrust his joy against the weight of the sea;
climbed through, slid under those long banks of
foam--
(hawthorn hedges in spring, thorns in the face stinging).
How his brown strength drove through the hollow and coil
of green-through weirs of water!
Muscle of arm thrust down long muscle of water;
and swimming so, went out of sight
where mortal, masterful, frail, the gulls went wheeling
in air as he in water, with delight.

Turn home, the sun goes down; swimmer, turn home.
Last leaf of gold vanishes from the sea-curve.
Take the big roller's shoulder, speed and serve;
come to the long beach home like a gull diving.

For on the sand the grey-wolf sea lies, snarling,
cold twilight wind splits the waves' hair and shows
the bones they worry in their wolf-teeth. O, wind blows
and sea crouches on sand, fawning and mouthing;
drops there and snatches again, drops and again snatches
its broken toys, its whitened pebbles and shells.

South of my Days

South of my days' circle, part of my blood's country,
rises that tableland, high delicate outline
of bony slopes wincing under the winter,
low trees, blue-leaved and olive, outcropping granite-
clean, lean, hungry country. The creek's leaf-silenced,
willow choked, the slope a tangle of medlar and crabapple
branching over and under, blotched with a green lichen;
and the old cottage lurches in for shelter.

O cold the black-frost night. The walls draw in to the warmth
and the old roof cracks its joints; the slung kettle
hisses a leak on the fire. Hardly to be believed that summer will turn up again
some day in a wave of rambler-roses,
thrust it's hot face in here to tell another yarn-
a story old Dan can spin into a blanket against the winter.
Seventy years of stories he clutches round his bones.
Seventy years are hived in him like old honey.

Droving that year, Charleville to the Hunter,
nineteen-one it was, and the drought beginning;
sixty head left at the McIntyre, the mud round them
hardened like iron; and the yellow boy died
in the sulky ahead with the gear, but the horse went on,
stopped at Sandy Camp and waited in the evening.
It was the flies we seen first, swarming like bees.
Came to the Hunter, three hundred head of a thousand-
cruel to keep them alive - and the river was dust.

Or mustering up in the Bogongs in the autumn
when the blizzards came early. Brought them down; we
brought them down, what aren't there yet. Or driving for Cobb's on the run
up from Tamworth-Thunderbolt at the top of Hungry Hill,
and I give him a wink. I wouldn't wait long, Fred,
not if I was you. The troopers are just behind,
coming for that job at the Hillgrove. He went like a luny, him on his big black
horse.

Oh, they slide and they vanish
as he shuffles the years like a pack of conjuror's cards.
True or not, it's all the same; and the frost on the roof
cracks like a whip, and the back-log break into ash.
Wake, old man. This is winter, and the yarns are over.
No-one is listening
South of my days' circle
I know it dark against the stars, the high lean country
full of old stories that still go walking in my sleep.

Late Spring

The moon drained white by day
lifts from the hill
where the old pear-tree fallen in storm
springs up in blossom still.
Women believe in the moon:
this branch I hold
is not more white and still than she
whose flower is ages old,
and so I carry home
flowers from the pear
that makes such obstinate tokens still
for fruit it cannot bear.

Drought Year

That time of drought the embered air
burned to the roots of timber and grass.
The crackling lime-scrub would not bear
and Mooni Creek was sand that year.
The dingo's cry was strange to hear.

I heard the dingoes cry
in the scrub on the Thirty-mile Dry.
I saw the wedgetail take his fill
perching on the seething skull.
I saw the eel wither where he curled
in the last blood-drop of a spent world.

I heard the bone whisper in the hide
of the big red horse that lay where he died.
Prop that horse up, make him stand,
hoofs turned down in the bitter sand
make him stand at the gate of the Thirty-mile Dry.
Turn this way and you will die-
and strange and loud was the dingoes' cry.

Bullocky

Beside his heavy-shouldered team
thirsty with drought and chilled with rain,
he weathered all the striding years
till they ran widdershins in his brain:

Till the long solitary tracks
etched deeper with each lurching load
were populous before his eyes,
and fiends and angels used his road.

All the long straining journey grew
a mad apocalyptic dream,
and he old Moses, and the slaves
his suffering and stubborn team.

Then in his evening camp beneath
the half-light pillars of the trees
he filled the steeped cone of night
with shouted prayers and prophecies.

While past the campfire's crimson ring
the star struck darkness cupped him round.
and centuries of cattle-bells
rang with their sweet uneasy sound.

Grass is across the wagon-tracks,
and plough strikes bone beneath the grass,
and vineyards cover all the slopes
where the dead teams were used to pass.

O vine, grow close upon that bone
and hold it with your rooted hand.
The prophet Moses feeds the grape,
and fruitful is the Promised Land.

Australia 1970

Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk,
dangerous till the last breath's gone,
clawing and striking. Die
cursing your captor through a raging eye.

Die like the tigersnake
that hisses such pure hatred from its pain
as fills the killer's dreams
with fear like suicide's invading stain.

Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood
that gaps the dozer-blade.
I see your living soil ebb with the tree
to naked poverty.

Die like the soldier-ant
mindless and faithful to your million years.
Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind.
stay obstinate; stay blind.

For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
more than scorpion or snake
and dying of the venoms that we make
even while you die of us.

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
the drying creek, the furious animal,
that they oppose us still;
that we are ruined by the thing we kill.

Legend

The blacksmith's boy went out with a rifle
and a black dog running behind.
Cobwebs snatched at his feet,
rivers hindered him,
thorn branches caught at his eyes to make him blind
and the sky turned into an unlucky opal,
but he didn't mind.
I can break branches, I can swim rivers, I can stare out
any spider I meet,
said he to his dog and his rifle.

The blacksmith's boy went over the paddocks
with his old black hat on his head.
Mountains jumped in his way,
rocks rolled down on him,
and the old crow cried, You'll soon be dead.
And the rain came down like mattocks.
But he only said,
I can climb mountains, I can dodge rocks, I can shoot an old crow any day,
and he went on over the paddocks.

When he came to the end of the day, the sun began falling,
Up came the night ready to swallow him,
like the barrel of a gun,
like an old black hat,
like a black dog hungry to follow him.
Then the pigeon, the magpie and the dove began wailing
and the grass lay down to pillow him.
His rifle broke, his hat blew away and his dog was gone and the sun was falling.

But in front of the night, the rainbow stood on the mountain,
just as his heart foretold.
He ran like a hare,
he climbed like a fox;
he caught it in his hands, the colours and the cold -
like a bar of ice, like the column of a fountain,
like a ring of gold.
The pigeon, the magpie and the dove flew up to stare,
and the grass stood up again on the mountain.

The blacksmith's boy hung the rainbow on his shoulder
instead of his broken gun.
Lizards ran out to see, snakes made way for him,
and the rainbow shone as brightly as the sun.
All the world said, Nobody is braver, nobody is bolder,
nobody else has done
anything equal to it. He went home as easy as could be

with the swinging rainbow on his shoulder.

Sonnet

Now let the draughtsman of my eyes be done
marking the line of petal and of hill.
Let the long commentary of the brain
be silent. Evening and the earth are one,
and bird and tree are simple and stand still.
Now, fragile heart swung in your webs of vein,
and perilous self won hardly out of clay,
gather the harvest of last light, and reap
the luminous fields of sunset for your bread.
Blurs the laborious focus of the day
and shadow brims the hillside slow as sleep.
Here is the word that, when all words are said,
shall compass more than speech. The sun is gone;
draws on the night at last; the dream draws on.

Northern River

When summer days grow harsh
my thoughts return to my river,
fed by white mountain springs,
beloved of the shy bird, the bellbird,
whose cry is like falling water.
O nighted with the green vine,
lit with the rock-lilies,
the river speaks in the silence,
and my heart will also be quiet.

Where your valley grows wide in the plains
they have felled the trees, wild river.
Your course they have checked, and altered
your sweet Alcaic metre.
Not the grey kangaroo, deer-eyes, timorous,
will come to your pools at dawn;
but, their tamed and humbled herds
will muddy the watering places.
Passing their roads and cities
you will not escape unsoiled.

But where, grown old and weary,
stagnant among the mangroves,
you hope no longer – there on a sudden
with a shock like joy, beats up
the cold clean pulse of the tide,
the touch of sea in greeting;
the sea that encompasses
all sorrow and delight
and holds the memories
of every stream and river.

Sonnet for Christmas

I saw our golden years on a black gale,
our time of love spilt in the furious dust.
'O we are winter-caught, and we must fail,'
said the dark dream, 'and time is overcast.'
-And woke into the night; but you were there,
and small as seed in the wild dark we lay.
Small as seed under the gulfs of air
is set the stubborn heart that waits for day.
I saw our love the root that holds the vine
in the enduring earth, that can reply,
'Nothing shall die unless for me it die.
Murder and hate and love alike are mine';
and therefore fear no winter and no storm
while in the knot of earth that root lies warm.

Request to a Year

If the year is meditating a suitable gift,
I should like it to be the attitude
of my great- great- grandmother,
legendary devotee of the arts,

who having eight children
and little opportunity for painting pictures,
sat one day on a high rock
beside a river in Switzerland

and from a difficult distance viewed
her second son, balanced on a small ice flow,
drift down the current toward a waterfall
that struck rock bottom eighty feet below,

while her second daughter, impeded,
no doubt, by the petticoats of the day,
stretched out a last-hope alpenstock
(which luckily later caught him on his way).

Nothing, it was evident, could be done;
And with the artist's isolating eye
My great-great-grandmother hastily sketched the scene.
The sketch survives to prove the story by.

Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,
Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

Turning Fifty

Having known war and peace
and loss and finding,
I drink my coffee and wait
for the sun to rise,

With kitchen swept, cat fed,
the day will quiet,
I taste my fifty years
here in the cup.

Outside the green birds come
for bread and water.
Their wings wait for the sun
to show their colours.

I'll show my colours too.
Though we've polluted
even this air I breathe
And spoiled green earth;

though, granted life or death,
death's what we're choosing,
and though these years we live
scar flesh and mind,

still, as the sun comes up
bearing my birthday,
having met time and love
I raise my cup -

dark, bitter, neutral, clean,
sober as the morning -
to all I've seen and known -
to this new sun.

Egrets

Once as I travelled through a quiet evening,
I saw a pool, jet-black and mirror-still.
Beyond, the slender paperbarks stood crowding;
each on its own white image looked its fill,
and nothing moved but thirty egrets wading -
thirty egrets in a quiet evening.

Once in a lifetime, lovely past believing,
your lucky eyes may light on such a pool.
As though for many years I had been waiting,
I watched in silence, till my heart was full
of clear dark water, and white trees unmoving,
and, whiter yet, those thirty egrets wading.

The Trains

Tunnelling through the night, the trains pass
in a splendour of power, with a sound like thunder
shaking the orchards, waking
the young from a dream, scattering like glass
the old mens' sleep, laying
a black trail over the still bloom of the orchards;
the trains go north with guns.

Strange primitive piece of flesh, the heart laid quiet
hearing their cry pierce through its thin-walled cave
recalls the forgotten tiger,
and leaps awake in its old panic riot;
and how shall mind be sober,
since blood's red thread still binds us fast in history?
Tiger, you walk through all our past and future,
troubling the children's sleep'; laying
a reeking trail across our dreams of orchards.

Racing on iron errands, the trains go by,
and over the white acres of our orchards
hurl their wild summoning cry, their animal cry....
the trains go north with guns.

Train Journey

Glassed with cold sleep and dazzled by the moon,
out of the confused hammering dark of the train
I looked and saw under the moon's cold sheet
your delicate dry breasts, country that built my heart;
and the small trees on their uncoloured slope
like poetry moved, articulate and sharp
and purposeful under the great dry flight of air,
under the crosswise currents of wind and star.
Clench down your strength, box-tree and ironbark.
Break with your violent root the virgin rock.
Draw from the flying dark its breath of dew
till the unliving come to life in you.
Be over the blind rock a skin of sense,
under the barren height a slender dance...
I woke and saw the dark small trees that burn
suddenly into flowers more lovely than the white moon.

JACK DAVIS

1917 - 2000

Jack Davis grew up at Yarloop, Western Australia. His mother was forcibly removed from her parents, and Davis himself later discovered the details of her tribal family history. Sent to the Moore River Native Settlement to learn farming at the age of 14, Davis' experiences there would later provide a foundation for his dramatic writing. After nine months he left the Settlement. His father's subsequent death created a family crisis which led to the first of many jobs for Davis. He has worked as a stockman, boxer, horse-breeder, train driver and truck driver.

While living at the Brookton Aboriginal Reserve, Davis started to learn the language and culture of his people. He was the Director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth from 1967 to 1971 and became the first Chair of Aboriginal Lands Trust in Western Australia in the same year.

His writing spans the genres of drama, poetry, short fiction, autobiography and critical material, and reflects a lifelong commitment to Aboriginal activism. His work explores such issues as the identity problems faced by Aboriginal youth in contemporary society, the wider sense of loss experienced in Aboriginal cultures, and the clash of Aboriginal and White law.

Davis has won numerous awards and honours, including the The Order of the British Empire - Medal (Civil) in 1976, the Bicentennial BHP Award for the Pursuit of Excellence in literature and the arts in 1988 and the Swan Gold Theatre Award in 1990. Some of his poems were set to music by Chester Schultz in 1984, and he has also received honorary doctorates from Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia.

Jack Davis also made a significant contribution to Aboriginal literary life as a cultural activist and administrator. In the 1980s he co-founded the Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists' Association, was a member of the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the Aboriginal Arts Board. Davis was named a Living Treasure in 1998.

Aboriginal Australia

To the Others
You once smiled a friendly smile,
Said we were kin to one another,
Thus with guile for a short while
Became to me a brother.
Then you swamped my way of gladness,
Took my children from my side,
Snapped shut the law book, oh my sadness
At Yirrakalas' plea denied.
So, I remember Lake George hills,
The thin stick bones of people.
Sudden death, and greed that kills,
That gave you church and steeple.
I cry again for Warrarra men,
Gone from kith and kind,
And I wondered when I would find a pen
To probe your freckled mind.
I mourned again for the Murray tribe,
Gone too without a trace.
I thought of the soldier's diatribe,
The smile on the governor's face.
You murdered me with rope, with gun
The massacre of my enclave,
You buried me deep on McLarty's run
Flung into a common grave.
You propped me up with Christ, red tape,
Tobacco, grog and fears,
Then disease and lordly rape
Through the brutish years.
Now you primly say you're justified,
And sing of a nation's glory,
But I think of a people crucified -
The real Australian story.

Let Go

Let go of my hand
Let me be what I want to be
Let go of my hand
The sands of time Are trickling before me
I have not yet Achieved
what I want to be
Let go of my hand
I want to stand alone
In a sea of words
Pluck out the phrases
Soar like a bird
I want to stand on a mountain
Wait for the dawn
Yet be aware of
The approaching storm
I want to fashion a rainbow
That arcs through the sky
And iron out the dilemmas
Between you & I

JAMES MCAULEY

1917 – 1976

James McAuley was born in Lakemba, in the western suburbs of Sydney, in 1917, the son of grazier and real estate speculator, Patrick McAuley, and his wife Mary (née Judge). He spent most of his childhood at Homebush, where the family moved after his father's retirement, and attended Homebush Public School. Displaying early literary and musical talents, McAuley was sent to the selective public school Fort Street Boys High School, where he became school captain and won prizes for his writing; a number of his earliest poems appeared in the school magazine, *The Fortian*. In 1935 he matriculated to the University of Sydney, where he studied English and philosophy. At university he continued to hone his poetic craft, contributing poems to the student magazine *Hermes*, where he also became one of the editors. After graduating with a B.A. (Hons) in 1938, he went on to complete an M.A., writing a thesis on the influence of symbolism in English, French and German literature. From the late 1930s he supported himself in various tutoring and teaching positions, and in 1942 took up a teacher's scholarship, completed a Diploma of Education and was appointed to Newcastle Boys Junior High School. In June 1942 he married a fellow teacher, Norma Elizabeth Abernethy.

In January 1943, McAuley was called up for national service in the Militia, and quickly transferred to the Australian Imperial Force. In January 1944 he was commissioned in the Melbourne-based Army Directorate of Civil Affairs, where he renewed his association with another Fort Street graduate, Harold Stewart. While working at the Army Directorate in 1944, McAuley and Stewart concocted the 'Ern Malley' hoax, intending to expose what they saw as a lack of meaning in modernist literature and art. The target of the hoax was Max Harris, the Adelaide-based editor of *Angry Penguins* magazine and champion of literary modernism. When Harris took the bait and published the poems of 'Ern Malley,' Stewart and McAuley were (eventually) revealed as the actual authors, and admitted having concocted a fictitious identity for 'Ern' and using partly random composition methods to produce the poems. While the hoax did cause significant embarrassment to Harris—and has been seen by some as inhibiting the development of literary modernism in Australia—the poems of 'Ern Malley' have remained in print and continue to be a subject of significant critical debate: a consequence Stewart and McAuley surely did not intend. In 1946, McAuley published his first collection of poetry (in his own name), *Under Aldebaran*.

After the war, McAuley became a lecturer at the Australian School of Pacific Administration, first in Canberra then Sydney, a position he retained until 1959. While at the School he became deeply interested in the then Australian administered Territory of Papua and New Guinea, and was profoundly influenced by the Roman Catholic missionary archbishop Alain Marie Guynot de Boismenu (1870–1953). In 1952, McAuley converted to Catholicism, which would henceforth have a defining influence on his intellectual life. Immersing himself in Cold War politics, he became associated with the radical Catholic ideologue B.A. Santamaria, and was instrumental in the anti-Communist agitation that split the Labor movement and resulted in formation of the Democratic Labor Party in the mid-1950s. In 1955, he joined the Australian branch of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a conservative, anti-Communist organisation, funded in part by the CIA, and became editor of its

journal, *Quadrant*. McAuley's reputation as a poet was furthered with the publication of his second collection, *A Vision of Ceremony*, in 1956, and his credentials as a conservative public intellectual were bolstered by the publication of a collection of critical essays, *The End of Modernity: Essays on Literature, Art and Culture* (1959).

In 1960 McAuley and his family moved to Hobart, where he took up a position at the University of Tasmania, and the following year he was appointed to the chair of English at the University. Despite his academic duties he continued to write and publish poetry, including his epic poem *Captain Quiros* (1964), and the collection *Surprises of the Sun* (1969), which included a poem sequence 'On the Western Line,' based on McAuley's childhood experiences in the Western suburbs of Sydney. During the 1960s he also published a number of critical works, including a monograph on the work of Christopher Brennan (1963), a general introduction to poetics, *A Primer of English Versification* (1966), and a book-length study of Australian poetry entitled *The Personal Element in Australian Poetry* (1970). He did not abandon his interest in politics, publishing and organising in support of Australian involvement in the Vietnam War.

In 1970, McAuley was diagnosed with bowel cancer. After recovering from the illness, he devoted increased time and energy to ensuring his literary legacy. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1971, and was a joint winner of the Grace Leven Prize in that year. In 1975, he published a second collection of his essays, *The Grammar of the Real: Selected Prose, 1959–1974*, and a collection of his critical work on Australian poetry, *A Map of Australian Verse: The Twentieth Century*. Two collections of his later poetry appeared in 1976: *Time Given: Poems 1970–1976*, and *Music Late at Night: Poems 1970–1973*. Early in 1976, McAuley was diagnosed with liver cancer; he died on 15 October that year, in Hobart. His posthumous publications included the poetry collection, 'A World of its Own' (1977), a collection of his writing edited by his long-time friend Leonie Kramer (*James McAuley: Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary*, UQP, 1988), and a revised volume of his *Collected Poems* (1994).

A significant and often controversial figure in the Australian post-War literary landscape, McAuley's achievement as a poet has in recent years often been overshadowed by debates over his role as a right-wing intellectual. While unquestionably seen as a major Australian poet in his own time, it is a lasting irony that critical interest in McAuley's work since his death has been largely eclipsed by the interest in his short-lived creation 'Ern Malley.'

Terra Australis

Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean,
And you will find that Southern Continent,
Quiros' vision—his hidalgo heart
And mythical Australia, where reside
All things in their imagined counterpart.

It is your land of similes: the wattle
Scatters its pollen on the doubting heart;
The flowers are wide-awake; the air gives ease.
There you come home; the magpies call you Jack
And whistle like larrikins at you from the trees.

There too the angophora preaches on the hillsides
With the gestures of Moses; and the white cockatoo,
Perched on his limbs, screams with demoniac pain;
And who shall say on what errand the insolent emu
Walks between morning and night on the edge of the plain?

But northward in valleys of the fiery Goat
Where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots
His raging arrows with unerring aim,
Stand the ecstatic solitary pyres
Of unknown lovers, featureless with flame.

At Dawn

I woke as by a summons. Dawn
Burned low and pale upon its wick.
Across the moonless lawn the trees
Shivered, were still. And in that blurred
Grey world of light, like Naaman
I sank the labour of my sick
Unease, and lay beneath, serene.

Then newly risen, cleanly white,
As I a newborn child had been,
I softly sang, and felt within
Of tenderness so great a flood
I could scarce give my spirit room.
And with a touch of holy dread
The cold grey dew of morning wet my head.

At Bungendore

Now the white-buskined lamb
Deserts his ewe and bawls;
The rain spills from the dam;
A far-off bird-cry falls.

So harsh the bough, yet still
The peach-buds burst and shine.
The blossoms have their will;
I would that I had mine:

That carth no more might seem,
When spring shall clot the bough,
Iris'd by the gleam
Of tears, as it does now.

Cloud, Light

Long stillness of afternoon. The sky
Is ranged with terraces of grey.
The sun rides in the north, abstruse:
Above it, a narrow sinkhole brims
With blueish-white ethereal light
Intensely incandescent; below,
A wider opening pours down
Mild yellow rays dissolving to
An area of silver sheen
On the transverse grey-green subtle shifting
Textures of the waters of the bay.

The Inception of the Poem

Midnight once more; the untended fire sinks low;
The lamp stares down upon the book unread;
The papers on my desk have nothing to show:
I have not learned the things I wished to know,
The things I wished to say remain unsaid.

Again the dead pause, the need for a new start;
The vanishing of every name and form
That seemed the very contours of the heart;
And all the working mystery of art
A queenless hive deserted by the swarm.

Then suddenly, unbidden, the theme returns
That visited my youth; over the vast
Pacific with the white wake at their sterns,
The ships of Quiros on their great concerns
Ride in upon the present from the past.

Winter Nightfall

from Georg Trakl

Snow falls on the darkening boughs,
Evening bell rings through the shade;
For many guests the table's laid,
Well-appointed is the house.

Travellers come from field and fold
By dark pathways to the gate;
The Tree of Grace has blossomed late,
Turning earth's cool sap to gold.

Hard with pain the stony sill;
Indoors on the table shine
With pure brightness bread and wine;
Enter, wanderer, take your fill.

“ERN MALLEY”

“1918-1943”

Ernest Lalor "Ern" Malley was a fictitious poet and the central figure in Australia's most celebrated literary hoax. He and his entire body of work were created in one day in 1944 by writers James McAuley and Harold Stewart in order to hoax Max Harris and *Angry Penguins*, the modernist magazine Harris had founded and edited.

In the decades after their publication, the hoax had a negative impact on the cause of modernist poetry in Australia. Since the 1970s, however, the Ern Malley poems, though known to be a hoax, became celebrated as a successful example of surrealist poetry in their own right, lauded by poets and critics such as John Ashbery and Robert Hughes.

In 1940s Australia, Max Harris was a young genius poet and writer - an outspoken leader in a nascent modernist movement. He was handsome, witty, spectacularly erudite and fearless in debate.

In the conservative climate of Adelaide, his intellectual elan and progressive thinking attracted detractors and envy early in his life. As editor of a provocative literary and art magazine called *Angry Penguins* based at the University of Adelaide, he had attracted the interest of Melbourne lawyer, intellectual and arts patron John Reed who invited him to Melbourne to expand the publication. There, *Angry Penguins* embraced and was embraced by the burgeoning energies of Australia's new modernist visual arts, that which now is known as the Heide Movement - Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd...

Reed's wife, Sunday, was earth mother to the artists, gathering and nurturing them at the Reed's farmhouse, Heide.

It was a civilized rural retreat, filled with books and paintings - and also Siamese cats, which Sunday bred.

Sunday's hospitality was strictly vegetarian - and all the guests were expected not only to contribute to the cerebral interchange but to pull their weight domestically. Sunday had been born into the wealthy Establishment Ballieu family of Melbourne but had become a crucial part of a world which was seen as very avant-garde and politically suspect.

Harris became core to the fomenting activities of this world - its social realist ideology, communist militancy, surrealism - while energetically publishing progressive Australian and overseas literature both in *Angry Penguins* and under the imprimatur of the Reed & Harris publishing company.

Australia's traditionalists took aggressive exception to the unconventional ideas and imagery of these pioneering modernists as they materialised through *Angry Penguins*.

The first *Angry Penguins* appeared out of the University of Adelaide in 1940. Editor Max Harris was 19, a student of Economics and English - but more significantly, he already was a published and recognised poet and he had been a member of the Jindyworobak Club, an earlier movement devoted to emancipating an Australian identity in literature.

His *Angry Penguins* co-editor was D.B. "Sam" Kerr, a fellow student and accomplished modernist poet who was killed in action in New Guinea in 1942. Their quest was a boldly rebellious one, to liberate Australian literature and art,

seeking, as Harris put it, "a mythic sense of a geographical and cultural identity". - no less than a change in the Australian national self-perception.

The first issue of Angry Penguins, funded by Harris's mother, was a literary anthology devoted to modernist writings. Its name was the inspiration of the journal's patron, Charles Jury. It came from Harris's poem, "Mithridatum of Despair":

*"We know no mithridatum of despair
as drunks, the angry penguins of the night,
straddling the cobbles of the square
tying a shoelace by fogged lamplight."*

Jury thought the description of "angry penguins" suited the young poets on their revolutionary literary quest. Famously, he commented that there was "a sense of genius about the place".

Also among the Angry Penguins founders were the scholar Paul G. Pfeiffer and the poet Geoffrey Dutton. Like Kerr, Pfeiffer did not return from the war.

Harris's passions, however, did not stop at the written word. He was a clarion advocate of surrealism and he was pivotally involved in the establishment of the South Australian Contemporary Arts Society.

After the first issue of the Angry Penguins, the Melbourne lawyer John Reed visited Adelaide to seek out the vital young intellectual who was making such waves. Reed was soon to abandon law in favor of running Victoria's Contemporary Art Society. It was through Reed, of course, that Harris made his connection with the artist Sidney Nolan. The link stimulated Harris to marry the two modernist movements, art and literature, and the second issue of Angry Penguins featured reproductions of a surrealist painting by James Gleeson and a Klee-like work by Sidney Nolan along with writings poetic, philosophical and ideological. Artist and critic Ivor Francis and jazzman/artist/poet Dave Dallwitz were among the contributors.

Thus did Angry Penguins forge onwards to express the aesthetic and literary impetus of the period - and, to a certain controversial extent, to elicit the change it sought.

The Conservatives of that period were less subtle than the ones which were to follow. They were Harris's fellow students at the University of Adelaide. In 1941 with the early part of WWII raging in North Africa, the students were fired with patriotism and were enraged by the anarchistic sentiments they encountered in the first issue of Angry Penguins.

A campus meeting was called in which Harris and Angry Penguins were condemned and the students called for punishment - by throwing Harris and three other anarchist students into the nearby River Torrens. Harris leapt onto a table and volunteered to throw himself into the River if the students would take up a collection for the war effort and the red Cross.

The students chose the dunking. The deed was done by engineering and medical students - but not before the media had been summoned to sensationalise the event. Despite the publicity and opprobrium, Harris surged forth with confident commitment to his cause.

In 1943, with his degree completed, Harris accepted Reed's invitation to move to Melbourne and Angry Penguins was edited conjointly with John Reed - with added injections of energy from Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker.

With sublime prescience, Angry Penguins published the modernist writers from overseas - Dylan Thomas, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, James Dickey... American poet Harry Roskolenko wrote for Angry Penguins and was guest editor for one issue.

More conventional literature was represented by the likes of Alan Marshall, Peter Cowan, Dal Stevens and women such as Elizabeth Galloway and Elizabeth Lambert. Artist and art critic Ivor Francis was a contributor while artists Nolan, Gleeson, Vassilieff, Perceval and Boyd were reproduced. The conservative literary world lived in simmering resentment of the political and aesthetic passions emerging in Angry Penguins, not to mention the exuberant intellectual instigations of young Max Harris, the "enfant terrible".

A.D. Hope had the first word in his vitriolic review of Harris's Vegetative Eye - and it is strongly suspected that he had a second word when it came to the Ern Malley Affair. "Get Maxy" was his reported catchcry, and these words are believed to have been uttered to the hoaxers, McAuley and Stewart in late 1943.

These two mediocre traditionalist poets, both in the army and stuck in the Victoria Barracks with lots of time on their hands, decided they would be the ones to teach Harris a lesson.

Lieutenant James McAuley and Corporal Harold Stewart thought it would be hilarious if they could invent a modernist poet, concoct some poetry and debunk the whole business of modernist poetry. So, in a series of mischievous creative fugues, they gleaned lines from here and there, even from the American Armed Forces guide to mosquito infestation, and put it together in what they perceived to be a brilliant imitation of the new poetic genre. They dubbed the poet Ern Malley and to avoid the publishers seeking contact with him, they said that, like Keats, he had died young. They then invented his sister, Ethel, who "discovered" the poetry and decided to send it to Harris to judge it for literary merit.

Harris loved it. So did John Reed, Sidney Nolan et al. With immense pride and pleasure, Harris published Ern Malley in the 1944 autumn issue of Angry Penguins.

Reed & Harris subsequently published the poems in book form under the title of The Darkening Ecliptic. They were enthusiastically received.

After the prank was revealed, the hoaxers said their work had no literary merit - and that was the point. Harris, however, stuck to his guns. Whether they liked it or not, he asserted, McAuley and Stewart had written their best poetry, their only poetry of real genius. The assumed persona of Ern Malley had liberated them.

The subsequent issue of Angry Penguins largely was devoted to analyses of the poems - with contributions from Sir Herbert Read, Geoffrey Dutton, Reg Ellery, A.R. Chisholm, Brian Elliot, Adrian Lawlor, Albert Tucker and many more.

Angry Penguins was a large, complex magazine and it appeared irregularly. (In total there were only nine issues.) Because of this, Harris decided to produce an smaller interim publication called Angry Penguins Broadsheet. This filled in gaps with news and reviews on art and literature, and, as Harris put it "to engage in cultural controversy or polemics; to cartoon, pillory, debunk, burlesque".

Angry Penguins continued for two more years after the Ern Malley Affair. During this time Harris returned to Adelaide. Thereafter, Ern Malley's Journal was born and ran for several issues. Harris, by then running a book business with his old university friend and Angry Penguins business manager, Mary Martin, began producing a provocative book-oriented topical newsletter called Mary's Own Paper - and thereafter, he gave birth to the Australian Book Review and the literary magazine Australian Letters.

Max Harris was what they commonly call "a self-made man". He reflected almost nothing of his family background. It was not an issue of rejecting class, but

of modelling himself on every value which was antithetical to those of his father. Vic Harris, an outgoing travelling salesman in groceries who rose to become managing director of a major produce company, privately was an intolerant and bombastic man. Max was repulsed by his father's strident bullying and lack of curiosity about his fellow man. Max's mother, the gloriously named Claris Harris, was an intelligent woman and a voracious reader who excelled at bridge and croquet in lieu of any other possibilities in life.

Max was her only child - and a genius prodigy who learned to read as a toddler. Accompanying his mother to the local library in Mount Gambier in the South East of South Australia, he consumed all the children's books and then, still a small lad, he systematically read every book in the library from A-Z. And for the rest of his life, he retained the contents of those books - from anthropology and geology to plumbing and Sophocles.

He was writing poetry from tender years and having works published in the Sunday Mail newspaper's Possum Pages. It was only a talent for football which gave the young Harris any modicum of acceptance among the country schoolboys. Mainly he recalled bullying.

His escape from country town life was to sit for a scholarship to a city college. He did this behind his father's back - and when he won the scholarship, there was no encouragement from his father. No word at all. Instead, Vic turned and left the house - ironically, going off brag about his clever son over a few beers with his mates.

Under the Vansittart scholarship, Max moved to Adelaide as a boarder at St Peter's College where, again, his prowess on the football field saved him from complete punishment as an egghead. His English teachers, most particularly one J.S. Padman, relished his brilliance and gave profound encouragement, ever remembered by Harris. Harris devoured his education with ease, won 21 prizes at St Peters along with the Tennyson Medal as the State's top English scholar. He became House Captain and continued to write while working his way through larger libraries. In his final year, however, he abandoned school in the dead of night and joined the afternoon newspaper, The News, as a copyboy. There he was soon writing articles and going out on stories - even, famously, interviewing H.G. Wells when he visited Adelaide. Harris was a highly political teenager and one of the marks he left at the newspaper was an initiative to create a trade union for copyboys.

Beyond the paper, his poems were being published by The Jindyworobaks and attracting positive reviews. Enrolling for Arts and Economics at Adelaide University, he chummed up with a bookish girl called Mary Martin, pictured left, and they swiftly became figures of interest, Max forever walking around reading, being guided by his book-carrying friend, Mary. This platonic relationship was to last their lives. Max, however, had fallen in love with a young ballet dancer called Yvonne Hutton when they were both still at school, she at St Peters Girls College. Her rather elegant and proper parents did not approve of this relationship.

Harris was possessed of stupendous energy and a wellspring of enthusiasm. He was handsome, raven-haired with velvet brown eyes and a good voice. He also was charismatic, erudite and extremely witty - a combination which was to attract envy throughout his life.

His literary output was prolific. His The Gift of Blood collection of poems was published by The Jindyworobaks in 1940. His early and later verse was lyric. But surrealism became the style which was to generate all the controversy of the day. His The Pelvic Rose, published in the first Angry Penguins, stirred the pot already bubbling from an article he had written called I am an Anarchist - So What? There

was no funding for publishing so Harris's mother became the secret sponsor for his ventures - helping to finance the first three issues of Angry Penguins and a bound edition of his early writings..

The War was on and Harris went into service as a Corporal. He was not a very successful conformist at Military Camp and found himself digging a lot of latrines which he always remembered rather fondly - for it was within these excavations, out of sight of authority, that he sat and read the works of Proust. After three months he was released to be put on special research work - and doing occasional stints on watch for enemy aircraft from the top of a city department store. Harris was producing Angry Penguins. He was core to the founding of the Contemporary Art Society. He was provocative and political and prominent. And the lawyer John Reed came to Adelaide to seek him out - and the link with John and Sunday Reed, Heide and the artists was formed.

Harris was invited to Melbourne and he accepted, taking Angry Penguins and producing it from Melbourne with John Reed. They formed the publishing company Reed & Harris from which Harris was paid the princely sum of six pounds a week for his work as an editor, writer and publisher.

Max became an inner-sanctum member of the Heide group with Sun, John and Sidney Nolan. Nolan had returned from service AWOL under the pseudonym of Robin. Max spent a lot of time at Heide, sleeping in the sleepout except on Von's visits when they were given a room to share.

Von, who was furthering her ballet training at the Borovansky School, swiftly fell under Sunday's stylish spell, sharing many of the health cuisine interests and skills while Sun was captivated by young Von's beauty and energy. An enduring friendship was established. Max shared intellectual ties with John and Sid and a great affection for Sunday whose nurturing took the form of allocating a special "Max Table" for writing - a she guarded vigilantly, allowing no one but Max to use it.

Heide was not a commune, as seems to have become the myth. It was a gathering place wherein artists, particularly, were nurtured and encouraged. There was Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd as well as Nolan. The Reeds helped artists financially as well as spiritually. Much painting was done at Heide and there was an almost ferocious vitality in the exchanges of thoughts and ideas. Art and philosophy were argued. Books were devoured and discussed even more avidly than the exquisite vegetarian meals. Harris was in his element and was ever the catalyst and often the inspiration. It was he, for instance, who sparked Sid Nolan with the idea for the Ned Kelly series. Nolan had produced an image of a Kelly-like masked figure which Harris analysed as the self-portrait of the artist in hiding from the army.

The comparison with Kelly was drawn and, inspired and excited, the two friends set off on an expedition through the Kelly country. Nolan's place in Heide was more deeply entrenched than that of the others. He had been married and had a baby daughter called Amelda. But he moved in to be with Sunday and an extended relationship took place, stoically tolerated by John Reed - the famous "maison a trois". But, ironically, it was Reed's sister, Cynthia, with whom Nolan finally ran away. By then the Reeds were raising Sweeney, son of Joy Hester and Bert Tucker. But that's another story.

The intellectual hothouse atmosphere spread to the Reed & Harris offices - and wherever Max went. It was in this orbit in 1944 that the Ern Malley hoax took place.

As if the hoax was not bad enough, the police leapt into the controversy and Max was charged with published obscene poetry. The deadly hand of the Establishment getting its own back on the left-wing modernists.

Harris returned to Adelaide to face the charges. It was sensational court case. Max was savaged by the media. People spat at him in the street. Von's family's disapproval of Max reached new depths. Her father long since had rejected Max's request for her hand in marriage. Nonetheless, the couple had married and produced a daughter, naming her Samela after an Elizabethan poem by Robert Greene.

Max decided to remain in Adelaide with his little family and joined his old friend Mary Martin in a bookshop business. Mary Martin's Bookshop began as a small arty bookshop in Alma Chambers, Exchange Place, Adelaide. It became a gathering place for the cognoscenti. But Max showed a flair for business and soon the little shop needed to expand. It moved into Rundle Street in the centre of the city and, over the ensuing years, into yet larger premises in Da Costa Building, importing all manner of new exotica which Max and Von would discover on annual travels.

When Mary Martin moved to India, a country which long had drawn her, Max retained her name and bought her share of the business. The shop expanded to the other states, to New Zealand and even Hong Kong before it was taken over by Macmillans. Max's touch had been its magic - and when he retired from the business, it never shone again. Max's very genuine interest in people and his uncanny ability to steer them to the reading which suited, enlightened and delighted them was key to the success of the shop. Also his encyclopaedic knowledge of books. He knew all the books in print and out of print.

Many were the battles he undertook - fighting Australian censorship laws relentlessly until victory and defying the British stranglehold on books to make them cheaper for Australians. He initiated an Australian publishing house producing Sun Books and he became publishing advisor to British publishers, ensuring that their publication runs would produce remainders enough to supply the Australian market with high quality discount books.

By this time, the lean angry young man had become the elegant old Angry Penguin - slightly portly, always well-attired and carrying what had become a trademark silvertopped cane.

The Ern Malley Affair, however, had damaged his own literary output and he wrote fewer poems. Instead, he had taken to journalism and was a founder columnist in the Murdoch national daily, The Australian. His Browsing column ran for decades, making him one of the longest running columnists in the country. For some years he also wrote for the Adelaide Sunday paper, The Sunday Mail, a populist column which earned an enthusiastic following and gave him a new interaction with the proletariat, for whom he had an abiding affection.

He also avowed himself a feminist and made a lengthy study of the biographies of women.

An interesting link with his youth in the lovely South East of South Australia was his devotion to the work of Mother Mary MacKillop, a feminist educationalist nun who founded the Order of the Josephites. Harris was not a religious man, although he was a spiritual man. However, the struggle of this brave pioneer teacher who set up her first school in Penola, stirred him to many writings, recommending her as "a Saint for all Australians". He became acknowledged by the Catholic Church as the lay person who had done the most to promote the works of the woman for it they craved beatification.

Max Harris published several smaller books of lyric verse over the years - *The Coorong and Other Poems*, *A Window at Night*, *Poetic Gems*... He also wrote *The Australian Way with Words*, *The Land That Waited*, *Ockers*, *Unknown Great Australians* and *The Best of Max Harris*. He continued always to encourage new writers and artists, never losing his connection with the art world. And although he travelled extensively, he kept Adelaide as a base.

When he died of prostate cancer in 1995, he was acknowledged as one of the greatest lyric poets Australia had produced. He was also honored by the University's Alumni as "the father of modernism in the Australian arts".

In death, Max Harris achieved yet more controversy when the Anglican Church refused him a burial of "roses and poetry" in a country graveyard in the South Australian mid-north town of Penwortham. With his body being brought back to the city and funeral arrangements in disarray, it was Mary MacKillop's Josephites who stepped in and invited Max to rest in their midst. Roman Catholic Archbishop Leonard Faulkner "in mufti" officiated, the nuns read poetry and eulogies, and Max's ashes were lovingly placed beneath a rock between the nunnery and the Mary MacKillop College. He was the second person in the history of South Australia whose remains were put to rest in a public place. The other was the Adelaide city founder, Colonel William Light.

Max Harris's response, written for the 1944 *Angry Penguins* as an introduction to Ern Malley's poems, *The Darkening Ecliptic*:

Ern Malley prepared for his death quietly confident that he was a great poet, and that he would be known as such. He prepared his manuscript to that end — there was no ostentation nor the exhibitionism of the dying in the act. It was an act of calm controlled confidence. He treated death greatly, and as poetry, while undergoing the most fearful and debilitating nervous strain that a human being could possibly endure. He was dying at the age of 25 with Grave's Disease.

Nobody had any idea that Ern Malley wrote poetry. For several years he was thought of simply as the young man who worked as a motor mechanic at Palmer's Garage on Taverner's Hill in Sydney, after leaving the Summer Hill Intermediate High School at the age of 14. When he turned 17 he went off alone to Melbourne, where little or nothing was known of his activities. He was said to have been living alone in a room in South Melbourne and earning his living peddling insurance policies for the National Mutual Life Assurance Company. He returned to Sydney where, after refusing to be operated upon, he died of Grave's Disease. Even his sister, next of kin, did not know that he wrote. In Sydney he was known to possess only one book — Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Classes." That is all. Yet I am firmly convinced that this unknown mechanic and insurance peddler is one of the most outstanding poets that we have produced here.

Yet this is not based on any romantic reaction to the circumstances by which his poetry has come into possession, nor by the great artistic self-possession with which he treated his forthcoming death. It is the perfection and integration of his poetry. This brief study will, then, treat almost entirely of the quality and nature of his poetry.

But first I feel there is justification for completing the story of Ern Malley. Recently I was sent two poems from a Miss Ethel Malley, who wrote saying that they were found among her brother's possessions after his death on July the 23rd, 1943. Someone suggested to her they might be of value and that she send them to me for an opinion. At this stage I knew nothing about the author at all, but I was immediately impressed that here was a poet of tremendous power, working through a disciplined and restrained kind of statement into the deepest wells of human

experience. A poet, moreover, with cool, strong, sinuous feeling for language. I sent these poems to my co-editor, Mr. John Reed, and they were then shown to a number of people, most of whom, without any information about the author, bore out my opinion. Then, at my request, Miss Malley sent the complete MSS, along with the facts about her brother as she knew them. I quote verbatim from her letter:

"You asked me for some details about Ern's illness. I didn't mention in my last letter that his death was due to Grave's disease. If he had only taken better care of himself it need not have been fatal. But while he was away from home he neglected his health. When he was called up for his medical exam the doctors evidently told him what was wrong with him, because he was rejected.

"But I don't believe he saw a doctor again until he came home last March, though I found out later he had been dosing himself with iodine and the doctor said that must have kept him going. He was terribly irritable and hard to do anything for. I was anxious for him to go to hospital where he could be properly looked after, but the doctor said it would be better for a person in his condition to stop at home. The doctor spoke of operating at first, but when he refused to have it done the doctor said it would be better not to, which I thought was strange.

"You asked me to tell you something about Ern's life. Well, my brother's full name was Ernest Lalor Malley and he was born in England at Liverpool on March 14, 1918.

"Our father died as a result of war wounds in 1920, and the family came out to Australia, where mother had relations. We lived for many years in Petersham, where Ern went to the Petersham public school and the Summer Hill Intermediate High.

"He did not do very well at school, although he was good at other things. Mother died in August, 1933, and I could not stop Ern from leaving school after that, as he was set on going to work. I have always thought that he was very foolish not to have got his intermediate [a high school graduation certificate — J.T.], but he was determined to go his own way. "He got a job as a mechanic in Palmer's Garage on Taverner's Hill for a couple of years. He was always clever with mechanical things and I thought he was settled and had got over his wildness. But when he turned 17 he came home one day from work and said he was giving up his job at the garage and was going to Melbourne. I did my best to persuade him, but he went. After that I did not see much of him or hear from him as he did not write, but someone I knew met him in Melbourne and told me that he was working for National Mutual selling insurance policies. They said he was living in a room by himself in South Melbourne. I remember I was worried at the time whether he was looking after himself properly, because he was never very strong. I wrote to him, but he did not reply for a long time.

"Later, in 1940, I think it was, I did get a letter from him saying that his health was better and that he was making a fair amount of money repairing watches and doing other work on the side. I did not hear from him again until the beginning of this year I found he was back in Sydney. I got him to come home, and it was only then I realised that he was ill, but even then I had no idea how bad he really was. He was amazingly active for his condition. Finally he told me that he knew what was wrong, and I managed to get a doctor to him. The weeks before he died were terrible. Sometimes he would be all right and he would talk to me. From things he said I gathered he had been fond of a girl in Melbourne, but had some sort of difference with her. I didn't want to ask him too much because he was nervy and irritable. The crisis came suddenly, and he passed away on Friday the 23rd of July.

As he wished, he was cremated at Rookwood."

Max Harris continues: "The manuscript consists of sixteen poems. It bears the title, "The Darkening Ecliptic," and at the bottom of the title page these words: —

"Do not speak of secret matters in a field full of little hills" — Old Proverb. This I take to be an explanation of his complete silence on the subject of poetry during his lifetime. Two handwritten pages exist under the heading of Preface and Statement. I wish to start this review of his work with the seven aphoristic paragraphs which constitute this preface and statement, and which give such a remarkable and moving insight into the poetic motives of Ern Malley.

These poems are complete. There are no scoriae of unfulfilled intentions. Every note and revision has been destroyed. There is no biographical data. I have been placed in somewhat the same quandary as was Max Brod in disposing of Kafka's writings. But with this difference. Ern Malley left no instructions, no indications of what he wanted done with his MSS. It was obviously prepared for publication. But he did not even mention its existence to his sister. Yet this statement assumes that posterity will be interested in his work, that the search for scoriae and biographical detail will take place. It is more of a challenge than an expression of his desires. For my part, I find such respect for the amazing relation of his art and his dying that I feel I have no right to conceal facts which bespeak greatness.

These poems are complete in themselves. They have a domestic economy of their own and if they face outwards to the reader that is because they first faced inwards to themselves. Every poem should be an autarchy. To this statement I can add little or nothing. It is a beautiful and succinct expression of my own feelings to a poem.

The writing was done over five years. Certain changes of mental allegiance and superficial method took place. That is all that needs to be said on the subject of schools and influences. That is all that can be said. What he read or when he read is a matter simply for conjecture. But from his poems there is evidence of tremendous assimilation and integration. The use of remote and esotereic [sic] language can at times be dangerous affectation and love of verbiage for its own colourful nature. In his few poems Malley's vocabulary spans innumerable worlds, but his use of language is never logomachical. His wide, difficult vocabulary emerges spontaneously and necessarily from his poetic motives. Appropriateness is the final test, and Malley reveals an acid preciseness in all his handlings with language. In his poem Young Prince of Tyre, Malley writes: —

*Yet there is one that stands i' the gaps to teach us
The stages of our story. He the dark hero
Moistens his finger in iguana's blood to beseech us
(Siegfried-like) to renew the language. Nero
and the botched tribe of imperial poets burn
Like the rafters. The new men are cool as spreading fern."*

This is the task Malley set himself as he deliberately invoked death upon himself to provide the deepening and consummating forces of poetic experience.

For the sake of the unity of death and poetry, Malley sacrificed his relationships with the woman he loved, left her, and returned to Sydney. This I think is clearly the meaning of his mighty 16th poem when he says:

In the same year

*I said to my love (who is living)
 Dear we shall never be that verb
 Perched on the sole Arabian Tree
 Not having learnt in our green age to forget
 The sins that flow between the hands and feet
 (Here the Tree weeps gum tears
 Which are also real: I tell you
 These things are real)
 So I forced a parting
 Scrubbing my few dingy words to brightness*

The Arabian Tree is his poetic fulfillment, and its tears are, without doubt, real. Yet in the epic suffering of his going away like the elephant to die, he does feel himself to triumph, for later in the same poem he says:

*I have pursued rhyme, image, and metre,
 Known all the clefts in which the foot may stick,
 Stumbled often, stammered,
 But in time the fading voice grows wise
 And seizing the co-ordinates of all-existence
 Traces the inevitable graph*

Malley approached poetry with a tremendous sense of the import [sic] of what he was doing. In one of his best poems, then, we find such relatively unfamiliar words as apodictic, valency, crenellated, enteric, and bourdon. Yet the poem logically demands these words because of its strict autarchical domestic economy. Language is not master; it is creator!

One or two of the critics (granted they had only seen two of his poems) said that his work was derivative and echoed various contemporary techniques. I am strongly of the opinion that these critics are completely wrong. His images are always pure and integrated within the poem in a remarkable cohesion. There is no hint of the Auden generation who tend towards the impersonal and philosophic as a product of the dynamics of their imagery. Malley stands in a curious, cool and penetrating way before the personal. The Auden school had not the confidence in the body of personal experience to make poetry of such humble personal material. Unlike the moderns from Dylan Thomas onwards, Malley is never carried along violently within the personal. With him image can be obscure, but never experience. Here, perhaps, he transcends Angry Penguin writers and contemporary English writers.

"The new men are cool as spreading fern." His sane personal verse is the embodiment in our time of this principle. I can link him up in my mind strongly with one poet only . . . the late Donald Bevis Kerr, yet it is strongly improbable that he ever saw Kerr's work. These two, with their diverse spiritual outlooks, are the two giants of contemporary Australian poetry. In both there is the same restraint and sense of responsibility towards language. But there the resemblance ends.

To discover the hidden fealty of certain arrangements of sound in a line and certain concatenations of the analytic emotions is the "secret" of style.

In this statement and the next two Malley concerns himself with the technics of poetry. The full force of what he has condensed into such a brief statement can only be gathered from seeing what he has actually embodied of "style" into his poetry. A certain difficulty is encountered in trying to understand what he means by the "analytic emotions." But I think the whole concept resolves itself into a simple

unambiguous reflection. The emotional experiences which motivate art are not those which are generally considered as “life” or “immediate” experiences. The level and kind of feeling from which poetry emerges and operates do not bear any direct relation to the individual in an immediate and suffering relation to the universe. Art is not Life, nor is it an imitation of life. It is experiencing at a different level from life; it is life, but differs in kind from it. Art emerges from experience at the “analytic” level of the emotions. Art reflects life at second hand, as it were, when experience and detachment integrate in a dialectical union of “poetic” or “analytic” experience.

The secret of style then is reduced to faithful reflection, for felicity of language is integral to the “analytic” experience itself. This, if anything, explains Malley’s detachment from the nerve-racking and terrifying experiences of his immediate life. The tragedy of the man is never reflected in the poetry, and this provides in part a measure of his greatness as a poet.

When thought at a certain level, and with a certain intention discovers itself to be poetry it discovers also that duty after all does exist: the duty of a public act. That duty is wholly performed by setting the pen to paper. To read what has thus been done is another thing again, and implies another order of loyalty. The poet’s duty, Malley believes, is the communication of poetry. The act of creation is the poet’s social act and identifies poetry with communication. Beyond that, duty may exist for the man, but not for the poet. The poetry owes nothing but its own existence to society.

Simplicity in our time is arrived at by an ambages. There is, at this moment, no such thing as a simple poem, if what is meant by that is a point-to-point straight line relation of images. If I said that this was so because on the level where the world is mental occurrence a point-to-point relation is no longer genuine, I should be accused of mysticism. Yet it is so.

With this statement of Malley I do not claim to be in full agreement. Possibly because it is impossible to say what he meant exactly by a “point-to-point straight line of “images.” For me, image can sustain itself, and produce coherent experience, by operating autonomously. Image, develops and acts as it were as an allegory of the experience of which it is a reflection. Image can only provide a complete level of expression when its autonomy is dynamic; that is, the image develops within itself through some series of valid relations. I can conceive, for instance, the vast homeric metaphor existing as poetry without direct reference back to the subject from which it emanates. Kafka produces novels from single metaphores [sic] and their direct relations.

Those who say: ‘What might not X have done if he had lived?; demonstrate their different way of living from the poet’s way. It is a kind of truth, which I have tried to express, to say in return: All one can do in one’s span of time is to uncover a set of objective allegiances. The rest is not one’s concern.

Malley moved within self-imposed limitations. He did not aim at revelation of all Truth, of inferring a valid *Weltanschauung* from his own range. He aimed to reveal his Truth. Yet if I were to say that within this range he reveals infinitely spheres which he would consider “not his concern,” I too would be accused of mysticism. Yet it is so.”

The Hoaxers were excited about their jolly jape. To be effective, it had to be a secret. But James McAuley and Harold Stewart were bursting to talk about it. And so it came to pass that with McAuley away in New Guinea on service, Stewart told his friend Tess van Sommers about it. She was a would-be journalist waiting for a cadetship on Sydney’s Sunday Sun. At the same time that he swore her to secrecy,

he gave her some pencil-written drafts of the Ern Malley poems and promised that she could have the scoop of this "wonderful jape" which was "going to absolutely slay Max Harris".

It was a bad move. Sommers jumped the gun the moment she saw the Ern Malley edition of *Angry Penguins* on the streets. Of course she was no journalist and the paper would hardly let her have her "scoop" - so senior journalists took over, hunting down the hoaxers before they were ready to account for their actions. They were not pleased. They were revelling in the success of their hoax. They wanted to make the most of it - and to keep their secret for as long as possible.

However, the hoax suspicions were erupting in a very different way in Adelaide. Max Harris was being accused of writing the poems.

He had given the Ern Malley edition of *Angry Penguins* to one of his former university lecturers, Brian Elliott. The academic was impressed by the poems, but immediately charged Harris with having written them as self-satire. Harris's emphatic denials were not enough for Elliott. He wrote in the university paper, *On Dit*, that he and other academics, while recognising the poetry as "very good" believed that Ern Malley was fictional - most likely Harris himself. The article was headed "Local lecturer cries 'hoax' - is Malley, Malley or Malley, Harris - or who?"

And the Ern Malley Scandal was born - seven months after the poems were written.

Harris found himself on the defensive. The poetry was acclaimed - but suspected. He knew he was not a hoaxer. He hired a Sydney private detective called Bannister to stake out Ethel Malley's address at Dalmar Street, Croydon. At first Bannister investigated the wrong address, 14 instead of 40. But he did check the electoral roll and establish that there was no E. Malley listed in the area. Number 40, he discovered, was occupied by people called Stewart and when, finally, he found a woman at home in the house, he was to be told that the person who may be able to talk about Ern Malley was in hospital. (As it happened, Harold Stewart was in hospital, recovering from surgery on an abscess.)

Harris's alarm bells were ringing. He cabled John Reed that there was a "strong chance" Ern Malley was a fraud.

By now the Sydney journalists were descending on McAuley and Stewart who, naively, insisted that van Sommers be the reporter of their story. Senior journalist Colin Simpson, had firm hold on the reins. It was he who chased up Harris, waking him from "Nembutal-stupefied sleep" at 2 am to catch him off guard and quiz him about the poems.

Not knowing about van Sommers' little arrangement with the hoaxers, Harris assumed that it was the English lecturer, Elliott, who had tipped off the media.

He pondered in a letter to John Reed that he was guilty of some over lack of restraint in his launching of Malley on the world, although he believed profoundly in the quality of the literature.

He volunteered to take responsibility for whatever may ensue.

The private detective was still at work, chasing up English professor and detective fiction writer J.I.M. Stewart, to whom Harris had early shown the poems for opinion. Stewart had said he was not impressed with the poems, but he was now among a growing list of suspects. He denied nothing, saying only that had heard of Ern Malley and Max Harris. Bannister also interviewed the Sydney journalists who were keeping their scoop to themselves. They published it in *Fact* - asserting that they had a poor opinion of the poetry and that there had never been a National Mutual Life Assurance salesman called Ernest Malley or an Ethel Malley in Croydon. They quoted Harris as saying that while there had been suggestions that

the poetry was a hoax "it is not our job to inquire into credentials but to value work as poetry".

Other detective work was going on between the university newspaper editors. On Dit editor Roy Leaney sent Ethel Malley's address off to his counterpart, Murray Sayle at Honi Soit in Sydney - and hit paydirt. Sayle immediately recognised the Malley address of 40 Dalmar Street, Croydon, as that of former student and would-be poet Harold Stewart.

But confusions and suspicions reigned for quite some time - fingers were pointing in all directions. Harris was still suspected of hoaxing himself. He, in turn, suspected various other writers of his acquaintance - Michael Keon and Adrian Lawler among them. There was much talk of "the soldier poets". Some people suspected it was a larger group of pranksters.

Then On Dit hit the streets, exposing Harold Stewart and Professor J.I.M. Stewart issued adamant denials. The story then broke in the mainstream press - and the guessing game was over.

McAuley and Stewart wrote fairly smug admissions which were printed in Sydney's Fact - claiming they had knocked up the verse in one afternoon "with the aid of a chance collection of books which happened to be on our desks". They described their poems as "nonsensical sentences" and "bad verse", "utterly devoid of literary merit as poetry". They claimed that it was all in the way of a literary "experiment".

A.D. Hope was in seventh heaven. The worse things were for Max, the happier was Hope. He had been in on the hoax since its inception now it was time for "a great big horse laugh" at seeing 'Maxie played for a sucker'. He called it "the greatest literary hoax since Bacon wrote Shakespeare". And his pleasure at thinking of poor Max "roll those great big bedroom eyes" was far from over. His venomous review of Max's surrealist novel was about to be printed - giving Hope the further satisfaction of kicking Harris while he was down.

The hoax was big news - and Ern Malley's name was becoming famous. The hoax was reported around the world. Harris, responding to the McAuley/Stewart explanations, said he hoped that their names may one day "grow larger than their highly commendable myth". They didn't. Ern Malley was their greatest creation - and, many say, their best work.

Harris's view was endorsed by none other than the distinguished literary authority Sir Herbert Read and, to a modest degree, T.S. Eliot - who read the poems in England. Read cabled Harris offering his support saying that he, too, would have been deceived by Malley's "elements of genuine poetry".

The bigger the scandal became, the more people wanted a slice of the action. Melbourne's Establishment had never been happy with the Heide crowd and Angry Penguins' leftist views. The persecution of Harris and Angry Penguins turned political. Even the Catholic Church was hitting out at Harris. He was mocked, attacked, vilified - and then the police turned up.

Detective Vogelsang arrived at the Adelaide office of Reed & Harris to inform Harris that he was under instructions to make inquiries about Angry Penguins under the Police Act "with respect to immoral or indecent publications".

In September, 1944, Max Harris went to court to defend Ern Malley against charges of obscenity.

Harold Stewart and James McAuley

There is a long-standing myth that these two conservative poets sat down spontaneously and churned out the Ern Malley poems in one grand burst on a wet

afternoon in their barracks. This was the initial claim of the hoaxers after the hoax was exposed - another way of demeaning the modernist genre. But it is dubious. Max Harris had reason to believe that the prank was planned and that more substantial work was involved. Perhaps he later learned this in communications with McAuley, for while Stewart sustained a lifelong hostility towards Harris, McAuley quite early expressed his remorse. Indeed, he sent Harris a clue written on the back of an art postcard at the time of the hoax. Harris pinned the card to the wall without noticing the clue - until much, much later. However, he and McAuley buried the hatchet later in life - and it was McAuley who acknowledged Harris as copyright holder of the Ern Malley works, writing that he did not believe in "claiming rights which we never asserted in our own persons" and that "Ethel Malley made a present of all rights to the editors" .

James McAuley

1917-1976

As a student of Sydney University, James McAuley shone among the young intellectuals. He was a vital individual, a poet, a jazz pianist and an enthusiastic drinker and smoker. Whatever the promise, however, he became a schoolteacher until the War when he, along with Harold Stewart, was enlisted in a mysterious military intelligence unit as a Lieutenant. As a poet, McAuley tended towards romantic symbolist style, a bit on the gloomy side. He loathed the modernist movement of the period with a vengeance. He also loathed communism with a passion. But he was a restless, discontented spirit, the biographers say. A trip to New Guinea both changed and inspired him - it led to his conversion to Catholicism as a spiritual palliative and to his subsequent work in Australian School of Pacific Studies. He was possessed of steely views, known to be a "Cold War Warrior", and to an adamant advocate of "the sanctity of Christian marriage". He was also known to suffer appalling nightmares. He played an important role in Australia's literary history, however, as founding editor of *Quadrant*, an anti-communist literary publication, and he became a professor of English at the University of Tasmania. He continued to produce poetry and critical essays.

Harold Stewart

1916-1995

A middle-class Sydney boy who started writing poetry at school, went on to study music and who dropped out of university after a year to study poetry. He was fascinated by Asian culture and art and was devoted to the writings of Jung. He was a Corporal in the Army Intelligence with McAuley and, although he early had shown interest in the modernists, he became fiercely opposed to their works. His poetry followed A.D. Hope in neo-classical style.

The only conventional job Stewart held was as a part-time bookseller in the Norman Robb Bookshop in Melbourne. From 1966 he lived in Japan where he taught English and studied Shin Buddhism. He became expert in Japanese culture. Grants from the Literature Board of Australian and the Australia-Japan Foundation supported him. He published two noted translations of Japanese haiku: *A Net of Fireflies* (1960) and *A Chime of Windbells* (1969) and wrote a sequence of poems, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. In latter years he lived reclusively within an expatriate community, a bitter man with no love for his homeland.

Stewart and McAuley thought modernist poetry was pretentious nonsense. They likened it to "a free association test". They agreed with A.D. Hope that it would be a good idea to "get Maxy" and to debunk what they called the "Angry Pungwungs".

They set themselves some facetious rules:

1. There must be no coherent theme, at most, only confused and inconsistent hints at a meaning held out as a bait to the reader.
2. No care was taken with verse technique, except occasionally to accentuate its general sloppiness by deliberate crudities.
3. In style, the poems were to imitate, not Mr. Harris in particular, but the whole literary fashion as we knew it from the works of Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece and others.

They started with an unfinished McAuley poem Durer: Innsbruck 1495 and went on to create an oeuvre of parodies, using snippets of text books, quotes of this and that, free associations...

"Having completed the poems, we wrote a very pretentious and meaningless Preface and Statement which purported to explain the aesthetic theory on which they were based. Then we elaborated the details of the alleged poet's life. This took more time than the composition of his Works," they later explained.

In typing the poems, Stewart made deliberate errors and corrections. Then they aged their creation by exposure to sun and dust. The prank was completed by the invention of Ethel Malley, the straight-laced suburban sister who discovers her dead brother's works and pleads for literary appraisal.

And it all turned out to be the two poets' most remembered works.

Max Harris had been prepared to take the hoax "in good part". He believed passionately in the literary merit of the poems and was always ready to defend them against conservative criticism. Suddenly he was called upon to defend them in a court of law - accused of publishing obscene material.

The press went to town on the story and suddenly Harris was a figure of high notoriety and ridicule. People jeered in the streets as he attended the courtroom. Some spat at him and even at his young wife-to-be, Yvonne.

The court was packed solid as the young avant-garde poet was interrogated about every nuance and metaphorical reference in the surrealist poetry. Part farce and part intense literary debate, there has never been a trial like it.

Detective Vogelesang, for the prosecution, insisted that Night Piece was obscene because:

"Apparently someone is shining a torch in the dark, visiting through the park gates. To my mind they were going there for some disapproved motive ... I have found that people who go into parks at night go there for immoral purposes".

He also found the word "incestuous" indecent in Perspective Lovesong, admitting "I don't know what 'incestuous' means."

Harris was subjected to extensive cross-examination by the Crown, called upon to explain the poetry, line by agonising line, sometimes one word at a time. Harris was asked to explain Ern Malley's references to Shakespeare and the contexts whence they were derived. Pericles, Prince of Tyre, reigned high in the Adelaide Police Court.

But, however hard the young Harris argued the case for literature and for Malley, the Magistrate would have none of it. Harris was told that he had "far too great a fondness for sexual references" and he was fined 5 pounds in lieu of six weeks in prison.

The hoaxers were silent.

Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495

I had often, cowed in the slumberous heavy air,
Closed my inanimate lids to find it real,
As I knew it would be, the colourful spires
And painted roofs, the high snows glimpsed at the back,
All reversed in the quiet reflecting waters —
Not knowing then that Dürer perceived it too.
Now I find that once more I have shrunk
To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream,
I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
the black swan of trespass on alien waters.

Documentary Film

Innumerable the images
The register of birth and dying
Under the carved rococo porch
The Tigris — Venice — Melbourne — The Ch'en Plain —
And the sound track like a trail of saliva.
Dürer: "Samson killing the Lion" 1498
Thumbs twisting the great snarl of the beast's mouth
Tail thrashing the air of disturbed swallows
That fly to the castle on the abraded hill
London:
Samson that great city, his anatomy on fire
Grasping with gnarled hands at the mad wasps
Yet while his bearded rage survives contriving
An entelechy of clouds and trumpets.
There have been interpolations, false syndromes
Like a rivet through the hand
Such deliberate suppressions of crisis as
Footscray:
The slant sun now descending
Upon the montage of the desecrate womb
Opened like a drain.
The young men aspire
Like departing souls from leaking roofs
And fractured imploring windows to
(All must be synchronized, the jagged
Quartz of vision with the asphalt of human speech)
Java:
The elephant motifs contorted on admonitory walls,
The subtle nagas that raise the cobra hood
And hiss in the white masterful face.
What are these mirk channels of the flesh
That now sweep me from
The blood-dripping hirsute maw of night's other temple
Down through the helpless row of bonzes
Till peace suddenly comes:
Adonai:
The solemn symphony of angels lighting
My steps with music, o consolations!
Palms!
O far shore, target and shield that I now
Desire beyond these terrestrial commitments.

Night Piece

The swung torch scatters seeds
In the umbelliferous dark
And a frog makes guttural comment
On the naked and trespassing
Nymph of the lake.

The symbols were evident,
Though on park-gates
The iron birds looked disapproval
With rusty invidious beaks.

Among the water-lilies
A splash — white foam in the dark!
And you lay sobbing then
Upon my trembling intuitive arm.

Petit Testament

In the twenty-fifth year of my age
I find myself to be a dromedary
That has run short of water between
One oasis and the next mirage
And having despaired of ever
Making my obsessions intelligible
I am content at last to be
The sole clerk of my metamorphoses.
Begin here:

In the year 1943
I resigned to the living all collateral images
Reserving to myself a man's
Inalienable right to be sad
At his own funeral.
(Here the peacock blinks the eyes
of his multipennate tail.)
In the same year
I said to my love (who is living)
Dear we shall never be that verb
Perched on the sole Arabian Tree
Not having learnt in our green age to forget
The sins that flow between the hands and feet
(Here the Tree weeps gum tears
Which are also real: I tell you
These things are real)
So I forced a parting
Scrubbing my few dingy words to brightness.

Where I have lived
The bed-bug sleeps in the seam, the cockroach
Inhabits the crack and the careful spider
Spins his aphorisms in the corner.
I have heard them shout in the streets
The chiasmata of the Socialist Reich
And in the magazines I have read
The Popular Front-to-Back.
But where I have lived
Spain weeps in the gutters of Footscray
Guernica is the ticking of the clock
The nightmare has become real, not as belief
But in the scrub-typhus of Mubo.

It is something to be at last speaking
Though in this No-Man's-language appropriate
Only to No-Man's-Land.
Set this down too:

I have pursued rhyme, image, and metre,
Known all the clefts in which the foot may stick,
Stumbled often, stammered,
But in time the fading voice grows wise
And seizing the co-ordinates of all existence
Traces the inevitable graph
And in conclusion:
There is a moment when the pelvis
Explodes like a grenade. I
Who have lived in the shadow that each act
Casts on the next act now emerge
As loyal as the thistle that in session
Puffs its full seed upon the indicative air.
I have split the infinite. Beyond is anything.

AMY WITTING

1918 – 2001

Amy Witting was born Joan Fraser in the Sydney inner west suburb of Annandale, on 26 January 1918, the daughter of Thomas Alexander Fraser, a postal worker, and his wife Elizabeth (née Reid). She was educated at a local Catholic school, St Brendan's (1923–1929), and at Fort Street Girls High (1930–1934). Her keen intellect occasioned social ostracism through her childhood, and she also suffered periods of illness with what was later diagnosed as tuberculosis. She began writing poetry at a young age, publishing her first poem in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, under the pseudonym 'De Guesclin', while still at school in 1934.

After school, Witting matriculated to the University of Sydney, where she studied languages and became associated with James McAuley, Harold Stewart, and Dorothy Auchterlonie, among others. The death of her father in 1937 meant she had to find work, and after holding a series of short-term jobs she was awarded a Teacher's College scholarship in 1939 and completed a Diploma of Education. She subsequently held a number of teaching positions throughout New South Wales, meeting her husband Les Levick while teaching in Kempsey in 1948. In 1953, she received treatment for tuberculosis at a sanatorium in the Blue Mountains, a period of enforced isolation which allowed her to devote time to writing. From 1956, Witting began to publish short stories in literary journals and magazines, her work attracting praise from leading Australian writers such as Patrick White, Hal Porter, and Thea Astley. Her first novel, *The Visit*, was published in 1977, and in 1979 she completed her second, *I for Isobel*, but this was initially rejected by her publishers for its unflattering depiction of motherhood.

In the early 1980s, Witting returned to writing poetry in earnest, publishing a number of poems in literary journals, especially *Quadrant*; her first poetry collection, *Travel Diary*, was self-published in 1985. In 1989, *I for Isobel* was published by Penguin, and proved an outstanding critical success. She followed this with a collection of short stories, *Marriages* (1990), and a further poetry collection, *Beauty is the Straw* (1991), which absorbed the content of *Travel Diary*. Witting's late-career emergence as a major Australian writer was recognised with her Patrick White Award in 1993. She continued to write with considerable energy until the end of her life, publishing four further novels: *A Change in the Lightning* (1994), *Maria's War* (1998), *Isobel on the Way to the Corner Shop* (1999), and *After Cynthia* (2001), two further short story collections, *In and Out the Window* (1995), and *Faces and Voices: collected stories* (2000), and a volume of *Collected Poems* (1998).

Witting died of cancer on 18 September 2001. Her contribution to Australian literature was recognised by the posthumous award of a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

early morning

Bird-calls tweak at the silence,
thread it with silk or
cheerfully scissor its edges,
glinting along the fringes of silence.

A long twig floats in the stillness
and flat leaves swim on a rising tide of air
around unmoving branches,
washing along the shoreline of stillness.

From deep bush only
a crowcall pierces,
travels and pierces.
The sky effaces
its rending sadness.

that was a dawn

That was a dawn for believing in goddesses,
so lively the colours were — the blue of bright eyes,
no sapphire, no, no jewel but the living iris,
the difference being perceptible in the heavens —
the roseflush I thought might deepen or fade at a word
from a cheeky godling or at a frown from Zeus.
Celestial life with its own frivolities,
the piles of a wharf mascara black and smudged
in the shimmering water, calm enough yet as a mirror
to beauty bending over the earth, more softly
repeating the blue of eyes and that rosepink
which seemed human. What was the colour of ichor?
But then, those gods and goddesses never could keep
themselves to themselves. It was such a beauty
as makes one frivolous, makes one laugh aloud.

liquidity

In a flurry of daylight, watercold, windy and sunny,
the tall liquidamber is dancing a daydream of money,
silver coins flashing among its rich copper and gold.
Ashputtel, hold out your apron for riches untold,
for bicycles, skiboats and ponies, for ease and for glee,
a ruby ring shaped like a heart and a house by the sea,
deep drifts of carpet caressing, consoling the feet,
money in pocketfuls, handfuls to toss in the street,
to startle, to melt the set faces, to cure disbelief,
a bucketful set in the doorway to smile at the thief,
for mink coats and Volvos, for Christmas trees twenty feet tall
and loaded with presents, new shoes and warm blankets for all.
O plenty, o cartloads, o boatloads ... The wind starts to die,
the little hands flutter a slow, ironic goodbye.

Epping Station

The rock along the railway line
forms a precipitous incline,
yet on its flaked, moss-tettered face
some hardy plants have found a place.

In the old war of root and stone
daisies and pigface hold their own.

On a three-centimetre ledge
with one claw curved to grip the edge,
the other splayed, quite undeterred
by passing trains, a mother bird
teaches her natty miniature
the art of living insecure.

Pleasant enough that plants contrive to find a roothold and survive;
how good that feather, bone and song
should harbour there, and prove so strong.

Theory of Aesthetics

The cottonwood stands at the garden's end. Its curving
branches hint at embrace.

New sprigs are springing now and draw their lace
across the sky, the infinite, unnerving.

Windows in walls are our need. Lucky are they,
cherished son and daughter,
who in that early love got bricks and mortar
and built themselves enduring walls in play.

Theirs was the hide in the jungle, igloo in the snow,
no wild beast could enter;
they looked out at the world from a safe centre,
a place where courage could be born and grow.

But against the edge of time can courage avail?
Against the planets' whirling,
against the eyes' desert, the lips' curling?
In the long run, every heart must fail,

and, cherished or not, we come at last for certain
to wear the dispossessed eye
that looks with loving pleasure upon the high
living palisade, the delicate living curtain.

a letter to W.H. Auden

I sit in the grip of horror
and hopeless vain regret
in front of our modern icon
the television set
while somebody introduces
a kind of oubliette.

The thing is an odd reversal;
oblivion overhead
while this well-furnished burrow
offers board and bed
to those who wish to be living
when all the rest are dead,

optimists bent on avoiding
the universal doom.
A place in the shelter will cost them
a reasonable sum;
five thousand dollars will let them
outlive the nuclear bomb.

Well, since we split the atom
what else can we expect?
I think we have given the fabric
inadequate respect
and that exploit was a flexing
of heedless intellect.

Those brilliant hymenoptera
weren't up to any good.
They didn't fight pain and sickness
or bring the starving food.
Why did they split the atom?
Because they thought they could.

Old Jupiter punished hubris
with prompt efficiency.
He would have interrupted
his current adultery
to teach the innovators that one and one make three.

But the old gods are silent
and the new gods are shrill
and frequently mistaken,
so good gives way to ill.
The devil we are born with
is arming for the kill.

If, in your gossips' heaven,
you seek the reason why
I trouble the conversation
with my poor, baffled cry —
it is the line you fashioned —
'We must love one another or die.'

I know you disowned it later,
since we die anyhow —
but not as a race, dear Wystan.
That didn't loom 'til now.
Is it a different failing
that made you disavow

the line your lovers remember?
Seeing you didn't give
the thing that most we were wanting,
the definition of love.
You didn't explain precisely
how to love one another and live.

On love, you were rather facetious:
is it a bird, a boy,
a ham or a pair of pyjamas?
Which seems to signify
that asking a silly question
will fetch a silly reply.

The thought of loving our neighbour
inspires us with alarm,
hooked as we are by beauty
and hypnotised by charm.
Must love be our only reason
for doing him no harm?

I think the word is an error.
It's been too often heard
in too many odd contexts.
Should honour be preferred
and a few significant virtues
replace one tyrant word?

If I have caught your attention,
it seems to me that you
will answer me that virtue
needs definition too —
and there's the core of the problem:
we don't know what we do.

Oh, send us a geiger counter,

a sensitive device
to tick at the presence of evil
and cause us great surprise —
the devil we are born with
being saintly in our eyes.

Not in the name of evil
will Armageddon start.
Some idealistic person
with virtue in his heart
will think it his painful duty
to call the red alert.

I've sat in a German bar-room
and drunk a friendly glass
with decent, honest fellows
who had worn the crooked cross.
They seemed to think their virtues
had brought them to that pass.

I've made my contribution
to our sad human fate.
Arrogance and oppression
divisiveness and hate —
despite my good intentions
they somehow got my vote.
I have no plan for survival
if this is the end of the line.
If offered a place in the shelter,
regretfully I decline.
I must accept the decision
knowing that it is mine.

last light

Ten minutes after sunset. Still a faint flush
behind the darkening trees. The tall parched bush
which all day long has drunk the sun and stored
the gold of it stands shining with its hoard
like a stilled hive — all other light receding
lovely, alone in its slow fading.

Ten minutes after sunset. The pine has drunk
darkness out of the air and towers black
against a sky of steel. At its far height
a spread of wings — a parrot taking flight
meets a last hidden gleam which from its breast
strikes a long shaft of amethyst.

This last light
the eye holds
beyond the night.

ROSEMARY DOBSON

b. 1920

Rosemary de Brissac Dobson was born in Sydney in 1920, the second of two daughters of Arthur Dobson (the son of English poet and essayist Austin Dobson), and his wife Marjorie (née Caldwell). Her father died when she was only five years old, and her mother found herself in difficult financial circumstances with two young children. The family was helped by Winifred West, the founder of Frensham, a progressive girls' boarding school in Mittagong, New South Wales, who offered Marjorie Dobson a position as housemistress, and scholarships for Rosemary and her sister Ruth. Rosemary Dobson displayed early talents both for academic study and for creative work, especially writing and art, and she began writing poetry while still a young child. In 1937, she produced a collection of juvenile poems at Frensham, designing the linocut cover herself and printing and binding the work with the help of the Frensham librarian and printer Joan Phipson—beginning a lifelong interest in fine printing and book arts.

At the age of 21, Dobson went to Sydney to study English at the University of Sydney as a non-degree student; she also studied drawing with artist Thea Proctor. From 1941, she began regularly contributing her poems to leading Australian newspapers and literary journals, especially the *Bulletin* and *Meanjin Papers*, and in 1944 published her first collection of poetry, *In a Convex Mirror*, with the Sydney bookseller Dymocks. Her early poetry often reflected her strong interest in European art history and the visual arts more broadly. In the early 1940s, Dobson joined the leading Sydney publisher Angus & Robertson as an editor, beginning a long career there. During the 1940s, she established friendships with a number of literary figures including Douglas Stewart, Beatrice Davis, Nan MacDonald, the artist and writer Norman Lindsay, and poet Francis Webb. Meanwhile she continued to publish and further her reputation as a poet. Her second poetry collection, *The Ship of Ice: with other poems*, was published by Angus & Robertson in 1948, and attracted significant critical acclaim; the title poem, a dramatic sketch in blank verse, won the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Literary Competition for poetry in 1948.

In 1951, Dobson married a fellow book editor, Alec Bolton, and over the following decade the couple had three children. Dobson continued to write and publish her poems in the press, and her third collection, *Child with a Cockatoo and Other Poems*, was published in 1955. Her next major collection, *Cock Crow*, appeared a decade later in 1965. The poems in these collections reflected a shift in her work towards themes taken from personal experience—including the experiences of childbirth and motherhood—though these themes are often explored in complex and impersonal ways. In 1966, Alec Bolton was appointed as Angus & Robertson's London editor, and the family went with him to England. While there, Dobson pursued her interest in art, and travelled frequently in Europe, including through Greece, where her sister Ruth worked at the Australian Embassy. On their return to Australia in 1971, Bolton was appointed to a position at the National Library of Australia, and the family settled in Canberra. In Canberra, Dobson enjoyed the resources of the National Library, and formed new literary friendships, including with David Campbell, with whom she collaborated in the publication of a collection of translations from Russian poets, *Moscow Trefoil* (1975), and a further collection of 'imitations' (*Seven Russian Poets*, 1979).

In 1972 Alec Bolton founded the Brindabella Press, a small press devoted to fine printing. Although not directly involved in the work of the press, Dobson took great pleasure in its work and in the enhanced connections she and Bolton had with a number of major poets whose work was published with the press, including Campbell, R.F. Brissenden, James McAuley and A.D. Hope. She continued to regularly publish her own work, which attracted increasing critical attention and praise. She was given the FAW Christopher Brennan award in 1978, after the publication of *Over the Frontier: poems* (1978), and her 1984 collection *The Three Fates and Other Poems* won the Grace Leven Poetry Prize and was co-winner of the C. J. Dennis Award for Poetry. Through her long career Dobson gave occasional lectures and published critical articles and reviews, as well as editing anthologies, including *Australian Poetry 1949-50* (1950), *Songs for All Seasons: 100 Poems for Young People* (1967), *Sisters Poets, 1* (1979), and *Directions* (1991), and published a novel, *Summer Press* (1987). But her major contribution to Australian life and letters has been her poetry. Her *Collected Poems* was published by Angus & Robertson in 1991, but she has continued to publish into her 80s; since the year 2000 she has published two collections: *Untold Lives and Later Poems* (2000), and *Folding the Sheets and Other Poems* (2004).

Rosemary Dobson's contribution to Australian literature has been recognised by the award of a number of major honours: she received the Order of Australia (AO) in 1987, the Patrick White Award in 1994, an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sydney in 1996, and was the subject of a National Library of Australia 'Celebration' in 2000. Her poetry has generally followed classical verse forms, and a deep respect and reverence for European literary and artistic history and traditions has been an important element in Dobson's work, though some major poems also draw on Chinese influences. All these influences in her poetry have always been transformed through a specifically Australian sensibility.

In a Convex Mirror

See, in the circle how we stand,
As pictured angels touching wings
Inflame a Dutch interior
Bespeaking birth, foretelling kings.

The room is still and brushed with dusk;
Shall we not disregard the clock
Or let alone be eloquent
The silence between tick and tock?

Shall we be fixed within the frame,
This breathing light to clear-cold glass
Until our images are selves
And words to wiser silence pass?

But ruined Rostov falls in flame,
Cities crumble and are gone,
Time's still waters deeply flow
Through Here and Now as Babylon.

And swirling through this little frame
Will rive the two of us apart,
Engulfing with unnumbered floods
The hidden spaces of the heart.

The Fisherman and the Moon

Under these caves are drips that pause
Like slow, time-frozen stalactites,
And mourning willows stoop to make
Memorial caverns for their grief.

“Fisherman, what have you caught tonight?”

“A netted river-haul of stars
And a dregged moon that shakes with cold,
Half-drowned in shifting darknesses.”

“Nightly she comes, poor suicide,
And, murmuring ‘Endymion,’
Trembles upon the river's brim.”

“I'll throw the stars back in again,
“But, woman or moon—,” said the fisherman,
“I'll find that fellow Endymion”—

“He's dead these thousand years,” I cried.

“You say so?” mused the fisherman;
“I would have liked a word with him.”

Every Man His Own Sculptor

I fixed this curious mould you read.
You note the setting of the head?
From chin to ear the lingering curve
Shaped in my course from birth to grave?

I am that insolent deity
Who lit the fires in either eye;
Sometimes my own Despair puts in
A smoky rim with pressing thumb.

My blade of Wonder shapes my brows
Into this arch of high surprise;
And Calm the tool that chisels smooth
The forehead standing broad above.

My mouth that's round would stretch to bite
For any cherries Life holds out,
And teeth, set straight, a cage afford
The poet's tongue, the singing bird.

I'll shape these long-boned, seeking hands
To know whatever either finds,
And spread them wide to spend or take
What Life can give—what I can make.

Summer's End

1. After the Summer Season

After the summer season, with the miraculous
Cleansing of waters the first wave of winter
Sweeps in a flood the sun-hats and the surfboards,
The spotted scarves and the sunshades striped like candy,
The children screaming at the water's edge with the seagulls
And the indolent sleepers on the sand—
Carries them in with a curl and a crash to the tramline
To the dignified bus like a rock to rebuff the confusion
And the foam and splash of departure.
Then from the roadway
The wave recedes with a sigh that hushes the houses
Where the flies settle in shuttered rooms and the cat abandoned,
Sleeks and prowls in the ivy.
And only at evening
Walks on the beach in the moonlight the lonely mermaid
Who married a mortal: who weeps at the edge of the water
Where the sand is like knives to her feet.

2. Picnic

Gum-leaves and blackberries burnt on the fire with an autumn
Savour of sadness—smoke was bitter, contesting
With the crossed blades of sunlight parting the pine trees,
Detecting an ambush. Tongues of flame like slander
Blackened the billy, bubbling with anger.
Down in the gully
I was a child again, sailing
Twig boats on the rapids where a trickle of water
Foamed brown and golden over the rock ledge,
While the tadpoles (years and years ago) slipped through my fingers
And maiden-hair and mosses, resentfully,
Took down my footprints ...
Dreaming by the fire I called myself, watching
For a child to run back through Time to a picnic.

A Walk in Richmond Park

The world ran backwards, colour ebbed,
The falling leaves crashed down and died.
Mist rolled from Europe to engulf
The dun and dripping trees, my steps
Skirred on dead summer underneath.

Keeping the world beneath my feet
And all that glorious summer crushed
To husks, I paced the royal park.
Crystals and stars hung from the trees
And nuns and deer sprang from my way.

How strangely companied I was!
In all that Monday space and time
But nuns and deer! And which were which
Could hardly be determined—both
In twos and threes kept watch and ware.

With neat and nimble feet they leapt
Nervously from my blundering way
And though I held in metaphor
The bread of friendship in my hand
They kept their sidelong glance from me.

Wimpled and antlered, soft of eye,
Timorous, disciplined and neat
Through mazy mist and thorny bough
Evasive still, on flying feet
They bounded, quivering, out of sight.

I did not care to sojourn there
Alone, unwanted, lumbering,
In shaggy coat and heavy boots.
Rejected, raging, I came down
To find my fellows in the town.

GWEN HARWOOD

1920–1995

Gwendoline Nessie Harwood, (1920–95), poet. With James McAuley and Margaret Scott, Gwen Harwood is one of the three best-known figures in twentieth-century Tasmanian poetry. She moved to Tasmania with her academic husband in 1945 and felt acutely the exile from her native Brisbane. Harwood published six collections of verse, beginning with *Poems* in 1963, and also wrote poetry under various pseudonyms.

A highly intellectual poet, Harwood's writing is suffused with references to European cities, philosophy and music, and characterised by wit and a sharp satirical eye. One of her most attractive aspects, particularly for women, is her reined-in and unsentimental capturing of the frustrations and costs of women's lives, particularly in Australian suburbia. Peter Porter called her 'the most accomplished poet the country produced in the twentieth century'.

Daybreak

The snails brush silver. Critic crow
points his unpleasant beak, and lances.
Resumes his treetop, darts below
his acid-bright, corrosive glances.

In the hushed corridors of sleep
Professor Eisenbart plots treason.
Caretaker mind prepares to sweep
the dusty offices of reason.

Eisenbart mutters, wakes in rage
Because crow's jarring c-a-a-r-k-s distress him.
His mistress grins, refers to age
and other matters which oppress him.

He scowls purse-lipped. She yawns, and throws
Her arms in scarecrow crucifixion.
Clear of the hills, light's wafer shows
In world-without-end benediction.

She makes him tea. He sips and calms
His Royal Academic temper,
While Life and Day outside shout psalms
In antiphon ... Et nunc et semper.

Barn Owl

Daybreak: the household slept.
I rose, blessed by the sun.
A horny fiend, I crept
out with my father's gun.
Let him dream of a child
obedient, angel-mind-

old no-sayer, robbed of power
by sleep. I knew my prize
who swooped home at this hour
with day-light riddled eyes
to his place on a high beam
in our old stables, to dream

light's useless time away.
I stood, holding my breath,
in urine-scented hay,
master of life and death,
a wisp-haired judge whose law
would punish beak and claw.

My first shot struck. He swayed,
ruined, beating his only
wing, as I watched, afraid
by the fallen gun, a lonely
child who believed death clean
and final, not this obscene

bundle of stuff that dropped,
and dribbled through the loose straw
tangling in bowels, and hopped
blindly closer. I saw
those eyes that did not see
mirror my cruelty

while the wrecked thing that could
not bear the light nor hide
hobbled in its own blood.
My father reached my side,
gave me the fallen gun.
'End what you have begun.'

I fired. The blank eyes shone
once into mine, and slept.
I leaned my head upon
my father's arm, and wept,
owl blind in early sun

for what I had begun.

'Thought is Surrounded by a Halo'

Show me the order of the world,
the hard-edge light of this-is-so
prior to all experience
and common to both world and thought,
no model, but the truth itself.

Language is not a perfect game,
and if it were, how could we play?
The world's more than the sum of things
like moon, sky, centre, body, bed,
as all the singing masters know.

Picture two lovers side by side
who sleep and dream and wake to hold
the real and imagined world
body by body, word by word
in the wild halo of their thought.

Anniversary

So the light falls, and so it fell
on branched leaved with flocking birds.
Light stole a city's weight to swell
the coloured loaf of stone. Your words
hung weightless in my ear: Remember me.

All words except those words were drowned
in the fresh babbling rush of spring.
In summer's dream-filled light one sound
echoed through all the whispering
galleries of green: Remember me.

Rods of light point home the flocking
starlings to wintry trees, and turn
stone into golden ochre, locking
the orbit of my pain. I learn
the weight of light and stone. Remember me.

In The Park

She sits in the park. Her clothes are out of date.
Two children whine and bicker, tug her skirt.
A third draws aimless patterns in the dirt
Someone she loved once passed by – too late

to feign indifference to that casual nod.
“How nice” et cetera. “Time holds great surprises.”
From his neat head unquestionably rises
a small balloon...”but for the grace of God...”

They stand a while in flickering light, rehearsing
the children’s names and birthdays. “It’s so sweet
to hear their chatter, watch them grow and thrive, ”
she says to his departing smile. Then, nursing
the youngest child, sits staring at her feet.
To the wind she says, “They have eaten me alive.”

Suburban Sonnet

She practises a fugue, though it can matter
to no one now if she plays well or not.
Beside her on the floor two children chatter,
then scream and fight. She hushes them. A pot
boils over. As she rushes to the stove
too late, a wave of nausea overpowers
subject and counter-subject. Zest and love
drain out with soapy water as she scours
the crusted milk. Her veins ache. Once she played
for Rubinstein, who yawned. The children caper
round a sprung mousetrap where a mouse lies dead.
When the soft corpse won't move they seem afraid.
She comforts them; and wraps it in a paper
featuring: *Tasty dishes from stale bread.*

Estuary

To Rex Hobcroft

Wind crosshatches shallow water.
Paddocks rest in the sea's arm.
Swamphens race through spiky grass.
A wire fence leans, a crazy stave
with sticks for barlines, wind for song.
Over use, interweaving light
with air and substance, ride the gulls.

Words in our undemanding speech
hover and blend with things observed.
Syllables flow in the tide's pulse.
My earliest memory turns in air:
Eclipse. Cocks crow, as if at sunset;
Grandmother, holding a smoked glass,
says to me, 'Look. Remember this.'

Over the goldbrown sand my children
run in the wind. The sky's immense
with spring's new radiance. Far from here,
lying close to the final darkness,
a great-grandmother lives and suffers,
still praising life: another morning
on earth, cockcrow and changing light.

Over the skeleton of thought
mind builds a skin of human texture.
The eye's part of another eye
that guides it through the maze of light.
A line becomes a firm horizon.
All's as it was in the beginning.

Critic's Nightwatch

Once more he tried, before he slept,
to rule his ranks of words. They broke
from his planned choir, lolled, slouched and kept
their tone, their pitch, their meaning crude;
huddled in cliches; when pursued
turned with mock elegance to croak

his rival's tunes. They would not sing.
The scene that nagged his sleep away
flashed clear again: the local king
of verse, loose-collared and loose-lipped.
read from a sodden manuscript,
drinking with anyone who'd pay,

drunk, in the critic's favourite bar.
'Hear the voice of the bard!' he bellowed,
'Poets are lovers. Critics are
mean, solitary masturbators.
Come here, and join the warm creators.'
The critic, whom no drink had mellowed,

turned on his heel. Rough laughter scoured
his reddening neck. The poet roared
'Run home, and take that face that soured
your mother's lovely milk from spite.
Piddle on what you cannot write.'
At home alone the critic poured

gall on the poet's work in polished
careful prose. He tore apart
meaning and metaphor, demolished
diction, syntax, metre, rhyme;
called his entire works a crime
against the integrity of art,

and lay down grinning, quick, he thought,
with a great poem that would make plain
his power to all. Once more he fought
with words. Sleep came. He dreamed he turned
to a light vapour, seeped and burned
in wordless cracks where grain on grain

of matter grated; reassumed
his human shape, and called by name
each grain to sing, conducting, plumed
in lightning, their obedient choir.
Dressed as a bride for his desire

towards him, now meek, the poet came.

Light sneaked beside his bed. The birds
began their insistent questioning
of silence, and the poet's words
prompted by daylight rasped his raw
nerves, and the waking world he saw
was flat with prose and would not sing.

Last Meeting

Shadows grazing eastward melt
from their vast sun-driven flocks
into consubstantial dusk.

A snow wind flosses the bleak rocks,

strips from the gums their rags of bark,
and spins the coil of winter tight
round our last meeting as we walk
the littoral zone of day and night,

light's turncoat margin: rocks and trees
dissolve in nightfall-eddy waters;
tumbling whorls of cloud disclose
the cold eyes of the sea-god's daughters.

We tread the wrack of grass that once
a silver-bearded congregation
whispered about our foolish love.
Your voice in calm annunciation

from the dry eminence of thought
rings with astringent melancholy:
'Could hope recall, or wish prolong
the vanished violence of folly?

Minute by minute summer died;
time's horny skeletons have built
this reef on which our love lies wrecked.
Our hearts drown in their cardinal guilt.'

The world, said Ludwig Wittgenstein,
is everything that is the case.
- The warmth of human lips and thighs;
the lifeless cold of outer space;

this windy darkness; Scorpio
above, a watercourse of light;
the piercing absence of one face
withdrawn for ever from my sight.

OODGEROO NOONUCCAL

1920 – 1993

Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal, known until 1988 as Kath Walker, was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska on 3 November 1920, on North Stradbroke Island in South-East Queensland, one of seven children of Edward (Ted) Ruska and his wife Lucy (née McCulloch). Her father, who belonged to the Noonuccal people, the traditional inhabitants of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), was employed by the Queensland government as part of a poorly-paid Aboriginal workforce; his campaigning for better conditions for Aboriginal workers left a strong impression on his daughter. She attended Dunwich State School until 1933, when, at the age of 13, she left to take up work as a domestic servant in Brisbane. Working for a number of different families in the 1930s, she was paid poorly but remained in domestic service because of the strong prejudices against and lack of opportunities open to Aboriginal women. In 1941 she enlisted in the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), earning promotion to corporal and working in switchboard operations and later in the AWAS pay office.

In 1942, she married Bruce Raymond Walker, a member of the Guginin (Logan) people and a childhood friend. The newly-married Kath Walker was invalided from the AWAS in 1943, after a serious ear infection left her with partial hearing loss, but she was able to train in secretarial and bookkeeping skills at Brisbane Commercial College under the army's rehabilitation scheme. With the help of friends, the Walkers were able to purchase a house in Buranda, and Kath found a job with a smallgoods manufacturer at Murrarie in Brisbane's eastern suburbs. Around this time, the couple also grew interested in politics, and became involved in the Communist Party of Australia—the only political party in Australia that did not support the White Australia policy at this time. By the time their son Denis was born in 1946, the couple had separated, and Kath Walker was forced to raise their son and maintain the household on her own. After her son began experiencing difficulties at school, Walker was forced to return to domestic service, working in the household of two prominent medical doctors, Sir Raphael and Lady Phyllis Cilento. In 1953, she gave birth to a second son, Vivian (later Kabul Oodgeroo Noonuccal), the child of the Cilentos' son Raphael junior.

In the 1950s, Walker became interested in writing poetry. By the late 1950s she had joined the Brisbane arm of the Realist Writer's Group, and some of her earliest poems appeared in the group's magazine, *Realist Writer* (later *The Realist*). In 1963, encouraged by her contacts in the Realist Writers Group, she submitted a manuscript collection of poems to Brisbane publisher Jacaranda Press. After a recommendation from Jacaranda's poetry reader, Judith Wright, the collection was published in 1964 as *We Are Going*. The work was an immediate commercial success, selling more than ten thousand copies and making Walker the best-selling Australian poet since C. J. Dennis. The plain-speaking style of her poetry, and the strong element of protest in it, precluded literary acclaim for her work, but the role of a political 'protest poet' was one in which Walker would come to revel. Her second poetry collection, *The Dawn is at Hand*, was published by Jacaranda in 1966. A third collection, *My People: A Kath Walker Collection* (1970, rev. eds. 1981, 1990) incorporated the content of the first two collections, and in later editions added new poems and essays.

During the 1960s, at the same time as developing her reputation as a poet, Walker became increasingly engaged in political activism in support of Aboriginal rights, social justice, and conservationism. Through friends she became involved in the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (QCAATSI) and came to play an important role in the national organisation, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). The FCAATSI played a leading role in the agitation that led to voting rights (in 1965) and Australian citizenship (in 1967) for Aborigines. In 1968, she moved to Holland Park, and the following year unsuccessfully stood as the ALP candidate in her local (state) electorate of Greenslopes. In 1969, she was invited to attend the World Council of Churches' Consultation on Racism in London. The event was a pivotal moment for Walker; she returned to Australia convinced of the need for Aboriginal activists to work within their own political organisations rather than white-dominated ones. At the end of the 1960s, she left the QCAATSI and the FCAATSI for the newly formed Brisbane Aboriginal and Islanders Council and the National Tribal Council (NTC), of which she was briefly chairperson. Power struggles within the Brisbane Council led Walker to leave the organisation in 1971 and return to her ancestral home of North Stradbroke Island.

While she was assumed to have withdrawn from public life, Walker had in fact entered a new phase of her career where she assumed the role of educator and cultural guardian and ambassador for her people. After some opposition from the Queensland government, she established the Noonuccal-Nughie Education and Cultural Centre at Moongalba, near Amity Point on Stradbroke Island. The Centre became an important venue for visiting Aboriginal students from around the country. Walker also travelled widely in the 1970s, going on lecture tours around Australia and overseas, living through a hijacking on a return flight from Nigeria in 1974. In 1978, she was poet-in-residence at Bloomsburg State College, in Pennsylvania, USA, and visited a number of other US Colleges. Walker continued to write and publish, her work now largely reflecting her career as an educator. She published a number of books of Aboriginal legends aimed at young readers, including *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972), *Father Sky and Mother Earth* (1981), *The Rainbow Serpent* (1988), *Legends of Our Land* (1990), and *Australia's Unwritten History: More Legends of Our Land* (1992). In 1982, she was awarded the FAW Christopher Brennan award for her contribution to Australian literature. In 1984, she visited China as part of an Australian cultural delegation, the trip providing the inspiration for her fourth and final poetry collection, *Kath Walker in China* (1988).

In 1988, as a protest against continuing Aboriginal disadvantage during the Bicentennial Celebration of White Australia, Walker returned the MBE she had been awarded in 1970, and subsequently adopted the Noonuccal tribal name Oodgeroo (meaning "paperbark"). Recognition of her literary, educational and political achievements continued to flow, however; she was awarded honorary doctorates from Macquarie University (1988), Griffith University (1989), Monash University (1991), and Queensland University of Technology (1992). In 1990, after the formation of the Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), she was elected a member of the Southeast Queensland Regional Council. Oodgeroo died at her home on Stradbroke Island on 16 September 1993. Her distinctive and pioneering poetry was part of a literary legacy that went hand in hand with her political life.

No More Boomerang

No more boomerang
No more spear;
Now all civilized —
Colour bar and beer.

No more corroboree,
Gay dance and din.
Now we got movies,
And pay to go in.

No more sharing
What the hunter brings.
Now we work for money,
Then pay it back for things.

Now we track bosses
To catch a few bob,
Now we go walkabout
On bus to the job.

One time naked,
Who never knew shame;
Now we put clothes on
To hide whatsaname.

No more gunya,
Now bungalow,
Paid by hire purchase
In twenty year or so.

Lay down the stone axe,
Take up the steel,
And work like a nigger
For a white man meal.

No more firesticks
That made the whites scoff.
Now all electric,
And no better off.

Bunyip he finish,
Now got instead
White fella Bunyip,
Call him Red.

Abstract picture now —
What they coming at?

Cripes, in our caves we
Did better than that.

Black hunted wallaby,
White hunt dollar;
White fella witch-doctor
Wear dog-collar.

No more message-stick;
Lubras and lads
Got television now,
Mostly ads.

Lay down the woomera,
Lay down the waddy.
Now we got atom-bomb,
End *everybody*.

Aboriginal Charter of Rights

We want hope, not racialism,
Brotherhood, not ostracism,
Black advance, not white ascendance:
Make us equals, not dependants.
We need help, not exploitation,
We want freedom, not frustration;
Not control, but self-reliance,
Independence, not compliance,
Not rebuff, but education,
Self-respect, not resignation.
Free us from a mean subjection,
From a bureaucrat Protection.
Let's forget the old-time slavers:
Give us fellowship, not favours;
Encouragement, not prohibitions,
Homes, not settlements and missions.
We need love, not overlordship,
Grip of hand, not whip-hand wardship;
Opportunity that places
White and black on equal basis.
You dishearten, not defend us,
Circumscribe, who should befriend us.
Give us welcome, not aversion,
Give us choice, not cold coercion,
Status, not discrimination,
Human rights, not segregation.
You the law, like Roman Pontius,
Make us proud, not colour-conscious;
Give the deal you still deny us,
Give goodwill, not bigot bias;
Give ambition, not prevention,
Confidence, not condescension;
Give incentive, not restriction,
Give us Christ, not crucifixion.
Though baptized and blessed and Bibled
We are still tabooed and libelled.

You devout Salvation-sellers,
Make us neighbours, not fringe-dwellers;
Make us mates, not poor relations,
Citizens, not serfs on stations.
Must we native Old Australians
In our land rank as aliens?
Banish bans and conquer caste,
Then we'll win our own at last.

Ballad of the Totems

My father was Noonuccal man and
kept old tribal way,
His totem was the Carpet Snake,
whom none must ever slay;
But mother was of Peewee clan,
and loudly she expressed
The daring view that carpet snakes
were nothing but a pest.

Now one lived right inside with us
in full immunity,
For no one dared to interfere
with father's stern decree:
A mighty fellow ten feet long,
and as we lay in bed
We kids could watch him round a beam
not far above our head.

Only the dog was scared of him,
we'd hear its whines and growls,
But mother fiercely hated him
because he took her fowls.
You should have heard her diatribes
that flowed in angry torrents
With words you never see in print,
except in D.H. Lawrence.

'I kill that robber,' she would scream,
fierce as a spotted cat;
'You see that bulge inside of him?
My speckly hen make that!'
But father's loud and strict command
made even mother quake;
I think he'd sooner kill a man
than kill a carpet snake.

That reptile was a greedy-guts,
and as each bulge digested
He'd come down on the hunt at night
as appetite suggested.
We heard his stealthy slithering sound
across the earthen floor,
While the dog gave a startled yelp
and bolted out the door.

Then over in the chicken-yard
hysterical fowls gave tongue,

Loud frantic squawks accompanied by
the barking of the mung,
Until at last the racket passed,
and then to solve the riddle,
Next morning he was back up there
with a new bulge in his middle.

When father died we wailed and cried,
our grief was deep and sore;
And strange to say from that sad day
the snake was seen no more.
The wise old men explained to us:
'It was his tribal brother,
And that is why it done a guy' —
but some looked hard at mother.

She seemed to have a secret smile,
her eyes were smug and wary,
She looked as innocent as the cat
that ate the pet canary.
We never knew, but anyhow
(to end this tragic rhyme)
I think we all had snake for tea
one day about that time.

Time Is Running Out

The miner rapes
The heart of earth
With his violent spade.
Stealing, bottling her black blood
For the sake of greedy trade.
On his metal throne of destruction,
He labours away with a will,
Piling the mountainous minerals high
With giant tool and iron drill.

In his greedy lust for power,
He destroys old nature's will.
For the sake of the filthy dollar,
He dirties the nest he builds.
Well he knows that violence
Of his destructive kind
Will be violently written
Upon the sands of time.

But time is running out
And time is close at hand,
For the Dreamtime folk are massing
To defend their timeless land.

Come gentle black man
Show your strength;
Time to take a stand.
Make the violent miner feel
Your violent
Love of land.

Namatjira

Aboriginal man, you walked with pride,
And painted with joy the countryside.
Original man, your fame grew fast,
Men pointed you out as you went past.

But vain the honour and tributes paid,
For you strangled in rules the white men made;
You broke no law of your own wild clan
Which says, 'Share all with your fellow-man.'

What did their loud acclaim avail
Who gave you honour, then gave you jail?
Namatjira, they boomed your art,
They called you genius, then broke your heart.

Civilization

We who came late to civilization,
Missing a gap of centuries,
When you came we marvelled and admired,
But with foreboding.
We had so little but we had happiness,
Each day a holiday,
For we were people before we were citizens,
Before we were ratepayers,
Tenants, customers, employees, parishioners.
How could we understand
White man's gradings, rigid and unquestioned,
Your sacred totems of Lord and Lady,
Highness and Holiness, Eminence, Majesty.
We could not understand
Your strange cult of uniformity,
This mass obedience to clocks, time-tables.
Puzzled, we wondered why
The importance to you, urgent and essential,
Of ties and gloves, shoe-polish, uniforms.
New to us were jails and orphanages,
Rents and taxes, banks and mortgages.
We who had so few things, the prime things,
We had no policemen, lawyers, middlemen,
Brokers, financiers, millionaires.
So they bewildered us, all the new wonders,
Stocks and shares, real estate,
Compound interest, sales and investments.
Oh, we have benefited, we have been lifted
With new knowledge, a new world opened.
Suddenly caught up in white man's ways
Gladly and gratefully we accept,
And this is necessity.
But remember, white man, if life is for happiness,
You too, surely, have much to change.

Return to Nature

Lover of my happy past
Soothe my weariness
With warm embrace.
Turn not from me,
Communicate.
Am I strayed too long
And now forsaken?
Your cold winds freeze
My offered love.

Was it yesterday
Or a thousand years,
My eager feet
Caressed your paths;
My opened fingers
Counted grains of sand
Hidden in the warmth of time.

Now my civilized self
Stamps its imprint
On reluctant sands
And time has flown.
Impatient to converse
My brutality
Turns you from my touch—
Oh lost, neglected love,
My tear-stained eyes
Open now to see
Your enemy and mine
Is — civilized me.

Last of his Tribe

Willie Mackenzie

Change is the law. The new must oust the old.
I look at you and am back in the long ago,
Old pinaroo lonely and lost here
Last of your clan.
Left only with your memories, you sit
And think of the gay throng, the happy people,
The voices and the laughter
All gone, all gone,
And you remain alone.

I asked and you let me hear
The soft vowelly tongue to be heard now
No more for ever. For me
You enact old scenes, old ways, you who have used
Boomerang and spear.
You singer of ancient tribal songs,
You leader once in the corroboree,
You twice in fierce tribal fights
With wild enemy blacks from over the river,
All gone, all gone. And I feel
The sudden sting of tears, Willie Mackenzie
In the Salvation Army Home.
Displaced person in your own country,
Lonely in teeming city crowds,
Last of your tribe.

The Dispossessed

For Uncle Willie McKenzie

Peace was yours, Australian man,
with tribal laws you made,
Till white Colonials stole your peace
with rape and murder raid;
They shot and poisoned and enslaved
until, a scattered few,
Only a remnant now remain,
and the heart dies in you.
The white man claimed your hunting grounds
and you could not remain,
They made you work as menials
for greedy private gain;
Your tribes are broken vagrants now
wherever whites abide,
And justice of the white man
means justice to you denied.
They brought you Bibles and disease,
the liquor and the gun:
With Christian culture such as these
the white command was won.
A dying race you linger on,
degraded and oppressed,
Outcasts in your own native land,
you are the dispossessed.
When Churches mean a way of life,
as Christians proudly claim,
And when hypocrisy is scorned
and hate is counted shame,
Then only shall intolerance die
and old injustice cease,
And white and dark as brothers find
equality and peace.
But oh, so long the wait has been,
so slow the justice due,
Courage decays for want of hope,
and the heart dies in you.

Racism

Stalking the corridors of life,
Black, frustrated minds
Scream for release
From Christian racist moulds.
Moulds that enslave
Black independence.

Take care! white racists!
Blacks can be racists too.
A violent struggle could erupt
And racists meet their death.

Colour, the gift of nature
To mankind,
Is now the contentious bone,
And black-white hatred sustains itself
On the rotting, putrid flesh
That once was man.

Assimilation—No!

Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river
And where is your wine? There is only the river.
Must the genius of an old race die
That the race might live?
We who would be one with you, one people,
We must surrender now much that we love,
The old freedoms for new musts,
Your world for ours,
But a core is left that we must keep always.
Change and compel, slash us into shape,
But not our roots deep in the soil of old.
We are different hearts and minds
In a different body. Do not ask of us
To be deserters, to disown our mother,
To change the unchangeable.
The gum cannot be trained into an oak.
Something is gone, something surrendered, still
We will go forward and learn.
Not swamped and lost, watered away, but keeping
Our own identity, our pride of race.
Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river
And where is your wine? There is only the river.

Integration—Yes!

Gratefully we learn from you,
The advanced race,
You with long centuries of lore behind you.
We who were Australians long before
You who came yesterday,
Eagerly we must learn to change,
Learn new needs we never wanted,
New compulsions never needed,
The price of survival.
Much that we loved is gone and had to go,
But not the deep indigenous things.
The past is still so much a part of us,
Still about us, still within us.
We are happiest
Among our own people. We would like to see
Our own customs kept, our old
Dances and songs, crafts and corroborees.
Why change our sacred myths for your sacred myths?
No, not assimilation but integration,
Not submergence but our uplifting,
So black and white may go forward together
In harmony and brotherhood.

We are Going

For Grannie Coolwell

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May Be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
They sit and are confused, they cannot say their thoughts:
'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.
We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunder after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.'

A Song of Hope

Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking,
The world is waking
To a new bright day,
When none defame us,
No restriction tame us,
Nor colour shame us,
Nor sneer dismay.

Now brood no more
On the years behind you,
The hope assigned you
Shall the past replace,
When a juster justice
Grown wise and stronger
Points the bone no longer
At a darker race.

So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,
Till hate be hated
And caste deposed;
Now light shall guide us,
No goal denied us,
And all doors open
That long were closed.

See plain the promise,
Dark freedom-lover!
Night's nearly over,
And though long the climb,
New rights will greet us,
New mateship meet us,
And joy complete us
In our new Dream Time.

To our fathers' fathers
The pain, the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.

Song

Life is ours in vain
Lacking love, which never
Counts the loss or gain.
But remember, ever
Love is linked with pain.

Light and sister shade
Shape each mortal morrow
Seek not to evade
Love's companion Sorrow,
And be not dismayed.

Grief is not in vain,
It's for our completeness.
If the fates ordain
Love to bring life sweetness,
Welcome too its pain.

Freedom

For Vivian Charles

Brumby on the wide plain,
All men out to break you,
My warm fellow-feeling
Hopes they never take you!

Dingo on the lone ridge,
Fleeing as you spy them,
Every hand against you,
May you still defy them!

All things wild and tameless,
Hunted down and hated,
Something in my wild heart
With your own is mated.

Dingo, wild bushranger,
Brumby that they ban so,
May you still outmatch them,
May you foil the man-foe!

MAX HARRIS

1921-1995

Maxwell Henley Harris AO (13 April 1921 – 13 January 1995) was an Australian poet, critic, columnist, commentator, publisher and bookseller.

Harris was born in Adelaide, South Australia, and raised in the city of Mount Gambier where his father was based as a travelling salesman. His early poetry was published in the children's pages of the Adelaide newspaper, *The Sunday Mail*. He continued to write poetry through his secondary schooling on scholarship to St Peter's College, Adelaide, and by the time he attended the University of Adelaide, he already was recognised as a poet and intellectual. He edited two editions of Adelaide University's student newspaper *On Dit* in 1941 when John Allison resigned.

Harris's involvement in poetry and his passion for the burgeoning European modernist movement underscored the creation of a modernist literary journal called *Angry Penguins*. This name was taken from one of his poems, *Mithridatum of Despair*. Fellow founders of *Angry Penguins* in 1940 were D.B. "Sam" Kerr, Paul G. Pfeiffer and Geoffrey Dutton. The first issue of the journal attracted the interest of the Melbourne lawyer and arts patron John Reed who sought out Harris in Adelaide, suggesting a collaboration in publishing the journal. Harris, already active in trying to establish a Contemporary Art Society in South Australia, was lured to the Reeds' Melbourne art enclave at Heide wherein Sidney Nolan was the primary artist under Reed's patronage. By the second issue of *Angry Penguins*, Harris had incorporated visual art into the journal - and, later, Nolan became an active member of the editorial team. Other artists such as Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, James Gleeson, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval also came under the wing of *Angry Penguins* and, through their careers and into posterity, have been known as "Angry Penguin artists".

Harris was too vivid and charismatic a young intellectual for the conservative Establishment of the period, and particularly the traditionalist poets were outraged by the success of *Angry Penguins* with its progressive content and promotion of surrealism. It was publishing the works of Dylan Thomas, Gabriel García Márquez, James Dickey and the American poet Harry Roskolenko.

The poet and critic A. D. Hope was among those most virulently opposed to Harris and the modernists and inspired two young poets serving in the army, Harold Stewart and James McAuley, to "get Maxy". Under the name of "Ern Malley", the poets crafted a series of poems in the modernist style and submitted them to Harris at *Angry Penguins*. The poems were accompanied by a letter from the poet's supposed sister, Ethel Malley, explaining that Ern had died of Graves' disease and she did not know if the poems were any good so she was giving them to Max Harris to do what he wished with them. Harris thought the poems were brilliant and he published them with some fanfare in *Angry Penguins*.

The poems were controversial but well received - except by the police in South Australia, where *Angry Penguins* was published. The police interpreted some lines in the poetry as lewd (one poem used the word "incestuous") and Harris was charged with obscenity.

Reed and Harris who, by this time, also were publishing books, employed a detective to discover more about the mystery poet - and then word emerged that Ern

Malley was a hoax. The poets were unrepentant. The trial went forward, its bizarre constabulary logic and valiant defence arguments from Harris and noted literary critics attracting international press attention. Harris was found guilty and fined five pounds.

Harris never wavered in his belief in the quality of the poetry - and Ern Malley has lived on to some acclaim. His poetry continues to be published and studied, his story dramatised and fictionalised.

Mithridatum of Despair

We know no mithridatum of despair
as drunks, the angry penguins of the night,
straddling the cobbles of the square,
tying a shoelace by fogged lamplight.
We know no astringent pain,
no flecking of thought's dull eternal sea
in garret image, of Spain
and love...now love's parody.

See - chaos spark, struck from flint
and the plunging distemper, flare in the dawn's dull seep
of milkcart horse, morning horse
chaos horse, walking at three to the doors of sleep
with the creamy poison.
convulsions endure
from nine to five,
all life immure.
and still alive.

we know no mithridatum, nor the remembered dregs of fear,
the glass stands dry and silted; no end is near.

Your Eyes Content Me

Your eyes, turning in sorrow, content me,
For there is in them a new and silent sorrow
As if your eyes, seeing that content,
Turn to, dying, that sorrow
Spent people live in as, dying,
They rest in some prior deathbed,
Accepting, loving, in that hour
The sorrowing eyes that are yet content
In the love that comes in the loss of love -
Love occasioned, sorrowed, and relinquished.

Because, in loving, in man's sorrow,
The heart's settling and dying content us,
All is relinquished, determined
By time and sorrow paid
And laid within its bed of loving,
Except love. Your eyes content me.

Biography

I am deciphered by the black waters,
union, and terrorist surge avid in my fields,
sun my god, the purpose love,
and the strong swing of hawks my blazing shield.
Here I was an age unfolding
like the rose my veneer panels to the rafters,
and the natural birds blinked,
and at my birth the yellow waters followed after.
I lay, like tyranny, in my own corn,
waiting nightfall as the mice
to play the moribund penury of desire
at the sneering globule of the moon.
Many times it descended, and my eyes,
the lids overburdened with shame,
and my darkness joining the burning
auguries of death, the salamanders in my breast.
At last I reached that sullen age
where my chains crackled and spat
like the burning of cellophane, bursting,
leaving me to descend with the
ghastly inevitability of virtue
on the sleeping cancer, the lambent world of men.
My shadow cast madness, and fangs
honored me from the jaws of dogs.
Children [sic] no longer wept, but laughed
their tiny sadistic joys up and down
the paralysing fingers of the town.
The old, decreeing death was dead,
raised great marbles, like teeth, to me.
But seeking one heart, despair
settled down like patient murder
upon the mobile world of my feet.
Leaving men for manna, dreams for blood.
imagination leapt aortal channels
and rested sibilant in the lake of gall:
the doctors operating on the landscape
removed the belly of the mountain
and gaunt entrails rolled like smoke-signs,
clouds, bellying from the hills,
on the laval sweetness of the slopes.
The trees that had lived to whip the birds
rocked and moaned, pitiful as mothers,
and breasts were tortured with the weight of milk.
This eye, the black eternal waters,
the wild incestuous caverns, my kiss,
lay trembling before this neutral agency;
and final was that whisper of the world

which said, 'O agony, to be love'.

HONE TUWHARE

1922–2008

Hone Tuwhare, a Maori-poet, was born in Kaikohe, in northern New Zealand. When he was six years old, his mother died and his father took him to Auckland. They lived there in a tin shack, with an earthen floor, but Tuwhare remembers it as ‘marvelous’.

In the beginning Tuwhare spoke only the Maori language at home. Afterward his father would speak only English with him, wanting to encourage his son’s success at the English-speaking schools. He didn’t go to college however, because his father could not afford it.

At age seventeen Tuwhare went to work at the railway workshops as a boilermaker. He became a fully certified boilermaker and a member of the union, where he was recruited into the Communist party. He resigned from that party in 1956 when the Russians invaded Hungary.

Tuwhare wrote his first poem when he heard that his father had died. He was already 42 years old when he published his first book, *No ordinary sun*. At the end of the nineties his collected poems were published, entitled *Deep river talk* (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu).

Tuwhare’s work has been called a mixture of working class language, the bible and Maori korero (narratives), ‘as if you are in church and in the pub at the same time.’

In 1999 Hone Tuwhare was named New Zealand's poet laureate.

No Ordinary Sun

Tree let your arms fall:
raise them not sharply in supplication
to the bright enhaloed cloud.
Let your arms lack toughness and
resilience for this is no mere axe
to blunt nor fire to smother.

Your sap shall not rise again
to the moons pull.
No more incline a deferential head
to the wind's talk, or stir
to the tickle of coursing rain.

Your former shaginess shall not be
wreathed with the delightful flight
of birds nor shield
nor cool the adour of unheeding
lovers from the monstrous sun.

Tree let your naked arms fall
nor extend vain entreaties to the radiant ball.
This is no gallant monsoon's flash,
no dashing trade wind's blast.
The fading green of your magic
emanations shall not make pure again
these polluted skies . . . for this
is no ordinary sun.

O tree
in the shadowless mountains
the white plains and
the drab sea floor
your end at last is written

Hotere

When you offer only three
vertical lines precisely drawn
and set into a dark pool of lacquer
it is a visual kind of starvation:

and even though my eyeballs
roll up and over to peer inside
myself, when I reach the beginning
of your eternity I say instead: hell
let's have another feed of mussels

Like, I have to think about it, man

When you stack horizontal lines
into vertical columns which appear
to advance, recede, shimmer and wave
like exploding packs of cards
I merely grunt and say: well, if it
is not a famine, it's a feast

I have to roll another smoke, man

But when you score a superb orange
circle on a purple thought-base
I shake my head and say: hell, what
is this thing called *aroha*

Like, I'm euchred, man. I'm eclipsed?

Haiku

But, I protest
my love for you
isn't minimal :

it is animal

To a Māori figure cast in bronze outside the Chief Post Office, Auckland

I hate being stuck up here, glaciated, hard all over
and with my guts removed: my old lady is not going
to like it

I've seen more efficient scarecrows in seedbed
nurseries. Hell, I can't even shoo the pigeons off

Me: all hollow inside with longing for the marae on
the cliff at Kohimarama, where you can watch the ships
come in curling their white moustaches

Why didn't they stick me next to Mickey Savage?
'Now then,' he was a good bloke
Maybe it was a Tory City Council that put me here

They never consulted me about naming the square
It's a wonder they never called it: Hori-in-gorge-atbottom-
of-hill. Because it is like that: a gorge,
with the sun blocked out, the wind whistling around
your balls (your balls mate) And at night, how I
feel for the beetle-girls with their long-haired
boyfriends licking their frozen finger-chippy lips
hopefully. And me again beetling

my tent eyebrows forever, like a brass monkey with
real worries: I mean, how the hell can you welcome
the Overseas Dollar, if you can't open your mouth
to poke your tongue out, eh?

If I could only move from this bloody pedestal I'd
show the long-hairs how to knock out a tune on the
souped-up guitar, my mere quivering, my taiaha held
at the high port. And I'd fix the ripe kotiro too
with their mini-piupiu-ed bums twinkling: yeah!

Somebody give me a drink: I can't stand it

Thoughts on a Sufi Proverb

A long time ago I was an atom. A one-ness in two, superbly put together. Full of potential, I was close to my essence. I died as an atom and progressed to another form. I became a stone just off the melt. I was cooling off.

I died as a stone and became a water-plant. As a plant, I learned to trap and eat meat. I died as a plant and became fish. As a fish I grew wings flying low over the heaving waters. Then I aspired to circle high above greening turret-lands.

When I died as a plant, another branch of me I liked grew legs and crawled out of the sea – on all fives. Or was it sixes or sevenses? No matter, I had arms, legs, and two hands with which I learned to pick up stones, sharpen a stick.

That other flying branch of me tried to pick out my eyes. They mocked me for not choosing a flying career. I ignored the jibes, ducking out of sight to avoid danger. I learned to throw stones. And soon, with a developed accuracy I could bring down my tormentors. I ate them feathers and all, only learning later to save the feathers to adorn myself.

I progressed from a plant, and became animal. I died as an animal and became man. Now. . . never did I grow less by dying, you understand?

I want to become stone again, but not the kind that is as cold as the forever night – the unlit side of the moon.

For a stone is as good a shape or form as any other. Compact and smoothened to become a million whispering grains of sand just crumbling quietly away to whatever ancestral dust; and all in good time, too, precisely, and with a resigned elegance.

Friend

Do you remember
that wild stretch of land
with the lone tree guarding the point
from the sharp-tongued sea?

The fort we built out of branches
wrenched from the tree
is dead wood now.
The air that was thick with the whirr of
toetoe spear succumbs at last to the grey gull's wheel.

*Oyster-studded roots
of the mangrove yield no finer feast
of silver-bellied eels, and sea-snails
cooked in a rusty can.*

Allow me to mend the broken ends
of shared days:
but I wanted to say
that the tree we climbed
that gave food and drink
to youthful dreams, is no more.
Pursed to the lips her fine-edged
leaves made whistle - now stamp
no silken tracery on the cracked
clay floor.

Friend,
in this drear
dreamless time I clasp
your hand if only to reassure
that all our jewelled fantasies were
real and wore splendid rags.

Perhaps the tree
will strike fresh roots again:
give soothing shade to a hurt and
troubled world.

Rain

I can hear you
making small holes
in the silence
rain

If I were deaf
the pores of my skin
would open to you
and shut

And I
should know you
by the lick of you
if I were blind

the something
special smell of you
when the sun cakes
the ground

the steady
drum-roll sound
you make
when the wind drops

But if I
should not hear
smell or feel or see
you

you would still
define me
disperse me
wash over me
rain

Reign Again

Neither juggernaught
man
nor crawling thing

can bring
a mountain weeping
to its knees
quicker than rain

that demure leveller
ocean-blessed
cloud-sent

maker of plains

Sea Call

Let the radio pip and shudder
at each dawn's news

Let the weatherman hint
a gaunt meaning to the chill
and ache of bone:
but when the new moon's bowl
is storing rain, the pull of time
and sea will cry to me
again.

And I shall stuff my longing
in an empty pack
and hasten to the secret shore
where the land's curve lies
clad in vermillion - and the green
wind tugging gravely.

There let the waves lave
pleasuring the body's senses,
and the sun's feet
shall twinkle and flex
to the sea-egg's needling
and the paua's stout kiss
shall drain a rock's heart
to the sandbar's booming.

Not by wind ravaged

Deep scarred
not by wind ravaged nor rain
nor the brawling stream:
stripped of all save the brief finery
of gorse and broom; and standing
sentinel to your bleak loneliness
the tussock grass -

O voiceless land. Let me echo your desolation.
The mana of my house had fled,
the marae is but a paddock of thistle.
I come to you with a bitterness
that only your dull folds can soothe
for I know, I know
my melancholy chants shall be lost
to the wind's shriek about the rotting eaves.

Distribute my nakedness -
Unadorned I come with no priceless
offering of jade and bone curio: yet
to the wild berry shall I give
a tart piquancy; enhance for a deathless
space the fragile blush of manuka ...

You shall bear all and not heed.
In your huge compassion embrace
those who know no feeling other
than greed:
of this I lament my satisfaction
for it is as full as a beggar's cup:
no less shall the dust of avaricious men
succour exquisite blooms with
moist lips parting
to the morning.

Papa-Tu-A-Nuku (Earth Mother)

We are stroking, caressing the spine
of the land.

We are massaging the ricked
back of the land

With our sore but ever-loving feet.
Hell, she loves it!

Squirming, the land wriggles
in delight.

We love her.

Roads

I turn away from roads,
sign posted hot macadams:
roads on smooth roads curving
looping under, up and yonder
going leading nowhere.

I dream of roads
but seek instead a tumble
stumble-footed course I know
will earn me sad wounds
cutting deep to bone.

I have learned to love
too much perhaps
rough tracks hard of going
poorly lit by stars.

Night-long voyagings
have found no easy path
to the silent gate
that is the dawn -
that truth beyond
that is the banished city.

Hearing only the night-birds
booming ancient blasphemies:
moon-dark ease reflection
in the knocking stones
the river chortling.

The Old Place

No one comes
by way of the doughy track
through straggly tea tree bush
and gorse, past the hidden spring
and bitter cress.

Under the chill moon's light
no one cares to look upon
the drunken fence-posts
and the gate white with moss.

No one except the wind
saw the old place
make her final curtsy
to the sky and earth:

*and in no protesting sense
did iron and barbed wire
ease to the rust's invasion
nor twang more tautly
to the wind's slap and scream.*

On the cream-lorry
or morning paper van
no one comes,
for no one will ever leave
the golden city on the fussy train;
and there will be no more waiting
on the hill beside the quiet tree
where the old place falters
because no one comes any more

no one.

Toroa ~ Albatross

Day and night endlessly you have flown effortless of wing
over chest-expanding oceans far from land.
Do you switch on an automatic pilot, close your eyes
in sleep, Toroa?

On your way to your homeground at Otakou Heads
you tried to rest briefly on the Wai-te-mata
but were shot at by ignorant people. Crippled.
You found a resting place at Whanga-nui-a-Tara;
found space at last to recompose yourself.

Now, without skin and flesh to hold you together
the division of your aerodynamic parts lies whitening,
licked clean by sun and air and water. Children will
discover narrow corridors of airiness between,
the suddenness of bulk. Naked, laugh in the gush
and ripple — the play of light on water.

You are not alone, Toroa. A taniwha once tried
to break out of the harbour for the open sea. He failed.
He is lonely. From the top of the mountain nearby he
calls to you: Haeremai, haeremai, welcome home, traveller.

Your head tilts, your eyes open to the world.

Nocturne

And if the earth should tremble
to the sea's unfathomed rage
it is because the sun has fled
uncapping the stone nipples
of the land.

The moon has torn
from the pulsing arm of the sea
a tawdry bracelet ... and I
alone am left
with the abandoned earth
and the night-sea sobbing.

My heart shall limping come
to police the night
so that no surly light
shall flare
nor sad spring blood forth
despondent moon
to limn the swollen night
in anguish.

DOROTHY HEWETT

1923 – 2002

Dorothy Hewett was born on 21 May 1923 in Perth, Western Australia but spent her early years on a isolated farm in the Western Australian wheat belt. Until she returned to Perth at the age of twelve to attend secondary school she was educated through correspondence lessons. She began to write poetry while she was still a child, with the aid of correspondence lessons in poetry appreciation and writing skills. In 1938 one of her poems, 'Dreaming', written when she was nine years old, was published in an anthology of work by school children. A collection of Hewett's juvenilia, including poems and a play, was published in 2009 as *The Gypsy Dancer and Early Poems*. After completing her schooling at Perth College, Hewett commenced an Arts degree at the University of Western Australia. She continued to write prolifically and a poem by her was published in the leading Melbourne literary magazine, *Meanjin*, when she was nineteen. She left university without completing her degree, marrying lawyer and communist writer Lloyd Davies in 1944, with whom she had a son, who died from leukaemia at the age of three. In 1945 she was awarded first prize in a national poetry competition conducted by the ABC.

In 1945 also, Hewett joined the Communist Party and continued to be an active member until 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, when she resigned in protest. In 1948 after the breakdown of her marriage to Davies, she moved to Sydney to live for nine years with Les Flood, boiler-maker and fellow communist, with whom she had three sons. During this time she also worked at the Alexandra Spinning Mills, drawing on this experience for her novel *Bobbin Up* (1959). Hewett returned to Perth in 1960 and married Merv Lilley, merchant seaman and communist, that same year; they had two daughters. After completing her Arts degree at the University of Western Australia, Hewett taught in the English Department there until 1974. After receiving a grant from the newly-established Literature Board of the Australia Council, she returned to Sydney, where she lived until moving to the Blue Mountains some years before her death in 2002.

Hewett's first collection of poetry to be published, *What About the People!* (1963), contains work by herself and Merv Lilley and includes mainly political and proletarian poems, often using the ballad form. The title poem from *The Hidden Journey* (1967) was written in 1966 after her second and final trip to Russia. Hewett's first major collection, *Windmill Country* was published the following year; it includes some of the poems from her first two collections as well as poems about her family such as the much-anthologised 'Legend of the Green Country'. After her return to Sydney, Hewett came in contact with younger poets such as John Tranter and Robert Adamson, sharing their interest in the new American poets such as Frank O'Hara and Robert Creeley. The highly autobiographical *Rapunzel in Suburbia* (1975) shows the influence of American confessional poetry. It includes four poetic sequences: 'Memoirs of a Protestant Girlhood', 'Ah! Those Dead Ladies', 'O! Baby, Baby it's a Wild World' and 'Rapunzel in Suburbia', each preceded by a quote from Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott'. *Greenhouse* (1979) includes further sequences as well as some shorter poems. *Alice in Wormland* (1987) is made up of nine continuously numbered sequences, among them 'The Alice Poems', 'The Nim Poems' and 'Alice in Wormland', and relates in particular to Hewett's

experiences in Sydney during the 1970s and 80s. *A Tremendous World in Her Head: Selected Poems* appeared in 1989 and won that year's Grace Leven Poetry Prize. A further *Selected Poems*, selected by Irish critic Edna Longley, appeared shortly afterwards in both England and Australia.

In the last decade of her life, Dorothy Hewett continued to produce major new works, including *Peninsula* (1994), which won both the Western Australian Premier's Poetry Award and the National Book Council's Turnbull Fox Phillips Poetry Prize. Her *Collected Poems: 1940-1995*, published the following year, once again won the Western Australian Premier's Poetry Award. In 2000 she published *Wheatlands*, co-written with fellow Western Australian poet John Kinsella, and in 2001 her final collection *Halfway Up the Mountain*, its title reflecting her home in the Blue Mountains, its contents focusing on both a return to her childhood and her continuing preoccupation with mortality. A new *Selected Poems*, the selection now made by her daughter, poet and academic, Kate Lilley, appeared in 2010, with a substantial introduction.

As well as writing her many collections of poetry, Dorothy Hewett was one of Australia's leading playwrights. Her plays, which combine a unique mix of symbolism, poetry, and music, and were often highly autobiographical as well as experimental in form, had a mixed reception, the most successful being *The Man from Mukinupin* (1979), commissioned for the sesquicentenary of Western Australia. She also published two further novels, *The Toucher* (1994) and *Neap Tide* (1996), and a prize-winning autobiography *Wild Card* (1990), as well as numerous articles and short stories. She was writer-in-residence at universities in Australia and the USA, and awarded eight fellowships by the Literature Board of the Australia Council as well as a lifetime Emeritus Fellowship from the Literature Board. In 1986 Dorothy Hewett was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to literature.

The Dark Fires

The dark fires shall burn in many rooms;
will they sometimes miss me with my tangled hair —
still girls in dark uniforms
crouching in winter with their cold hands trembling,
still voices echoing as our voices echoed
and the faded frumped-up form
of a mistress teaching French?
Does she remember us or do we pass
only like dreams of dark figures,
some with different hair or deep voices,
or merely countless hats hanging on pegs,
countless columns of moving massed black legs?
Our minds are sprawled on unforbidden lawns,
our voices lie like queer leaves in the clipped grass,
as we believe so we shall pass.

Steel Girders

Towers are hungry,
Rain-gotten towers,
Tender, rotten and iron
Trembling, delicate
Spindle-web strain.
What torture of bar upon
Bar of gold gleaming
In sun, with black backsides.
How it slides through the yellow
Evening colour, sidling, arc sending
Its one bright hysteria cord
Into chrome-coloured country.
What blending pictorial background
For wasteless, winged
Tower of industry, begotten
Of soil, carrying arms, carrying up
Till it ends in one, bright long carrying
Spindle-legged spasm of carrying
Consummated on skylines.

Memoirs of a Protestant Girlhood

I

I was brought up on Tennyson and Eliot.
What a double! On the yellow farm
floated like The Lady down a creek,
lying on my back the sun motes danced,
black cockatoos massed shrieking in the sky.
My little sister whinged,
my mother rang her bells,
I lived alone: the pages riffled
in the afternoons bound in morocco
temperatures soared, round tables cracked,
Grandma draped wet hessian round the house.
Queen of the May! I had a melancholy decline.

Later I walked dry grass,
arms full of water hyacinths, met your eyes,
between the pencil pines the Sisters paced
howling like altars, schoolgirls twined
their magpie beaks for summer pools,
the fat Headmistress read *The Wasteland*
right through in a tinny voice, her 3 chins
quivered;
blood on my legs I swooned on the cane lounge.

II

Under a bell jar in the sitting room
one gawk was playing 'Girl with the Flaxen Hair'.
We sat about nonchalantly draped, rugs, sofas,
manes, beaked nose, a knee, my guilty passion!
The paddocks heated, dimmed through smoky glass
The Lady floated, brushed her hair & wept,
flung out dead hyacinths in a pained surprise.
Your mother, in her green habit, cut the heads
off roses, recited *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.
Above the river as we ran to swim,
the pisspot mouthed us from her broken pane.
I lay in the sleep-out burning for your bed,
thought on my father playing Serenades,
my mother safe in baby sister's arms:
my tin canoe, sliding past Camelot
to the Thames bank.
sank full fathoms five.

III

Before the altar, see, I kneel, I smile,
dust rises from the cushions, the priest stutters,
the gramophone wheezes 'I'll walk beside you',

in red crêpe-de-Chine vowing eternal love,
thinking of you, my witness & my bridesmaid,
clad as a bank clerk in this holy place.
So thus & thus I cleanse my guilty passion
[...
...
...]

I fornicate on beaches, mime adulterous passions,
curettes in the dark,
looking like Dietrich slumming,
drive with a roughneck, in a black beret;
his Silver Anniversary Buick braves the desert,
you catch a bus up through the stony ridges,
scribbly gums, to visit, [...
...
...]

Now here we sit, kitchened, confined,
sprinklers play 'Auld Lang Syne',
you hand me poems I wrote
in an autograph album 30 years ago;
how they burn under your hydrangeas.
Above the garden,
the Anglican cross leans from St Mary's spire.

P100: 'Memoirs of a Protestant Girlhood'. Six lines have been deleted from Part III for legal reasons: a former husband of Hewett's claims that the lines are libellous. One of the poems in the autograph album is 'The Dark Fires', the first poem in this collection.

Legend of the Green Country

I

September is the spring month bringing tides, swilling green in the harbour mouth,

Turnabout dolphins rolling-backed in the rip and run, the king waves
Swinging the coast, snatching at fishermen from Leeuwin to Norah's Head;
A dangerous month: but I count on an abacus as befits a shopkeeper's daughter.

I never could keep count by modern methods, the ring of the till
Is profit and loss, the ledger, hasped with gold, sits in its heavy dust
On the counter, out front the shopkeeper's sign hangs loose and bangs in the wind,

The name is obliterated, the dog swells and stinks in the gutter,
The golden smell of the beer does not run in the one street, like water,
The windmill head hangs, broken-necked, flapping like a great plain turkey
As the wind rises ... this was my country, here I go back for nurture
To the dry soaks, to the creeks running salt through the timber,
To the ghosts of the sandalwood cutters, and the blue breath of their fires,
To the navvies in dark blue singlets laying rails in the scrub.

My grandfather rode out, sawing at a hard-mouthed ginger horse,
And a hard heart in him, a dray full of rum and beer, bully-beef and treacle,
Flour and tea, workboots and wide-awakes with the corks bobbing for flies;
Counting the campfires in the dusk, counting the men, counting the money,
Counting the sheep from the goats, and the rack-rented railway houses.
No wonder I cannot count for the sound of the money-changers,
The sweat and the clink, the land falling into the cash register,
Raped and eroded, thin and black as a myall girl on a railway siding.

He came back, roaring and singing up from the gullies, his beard
Smelt of rum, his moneybag plump as a wild duck under his saddle.
The old horse stumbled in the creek bed but brought him home,
The dray rattled; as they took him down in the yard he cursed and swore
At the dream, and blubbered for it: next Saturday night he rode his horse
Up the turkey red carpet into the bar, smashing the bottles and glasses,
Tipping the counter, sending the barmaid screaming, her breasts tilting with joy.
The great horse reared and he sang and swore and flung his hat at the sky,
And won his bets, and rode home, satisfied, to a nagging wife and daughter,
Having buried his pain and his lust under the broken bottles.

The publican swept them up in the cold light next morning,
And that was the end of it, they thought, but it wasn't so easy:
There is no end to it and I stand at the mole watching the sea run out,
Or hang over the rails at the Horseshoe Bridge and listen to the tide,
Listen to the earth that pleased my grandfather with his flocks and acres
Drowned under salt, his orange trees forked bare as unbreeched boys.
Only the apples, little and hard, bitten green and bitter as salt,
They come up in the spring, in the dead orchard they are the fruit

Of our knowledge, and I am Eve, spitting the pips in the eye of the myth-makers.

This is my legend; an old man on a ginger horse who filled his till
And died content with a desert, or so they said: his stone angel
Cost a pretty penny, but the workmanship was faulty, its wings curve
In a great arc over the graveyard, it grows mildewed and dirty,
Its nose is syphilitic, its feet splay like a peasant, its hands
Clasp over its breast like the barmaid who screamed in the pub,
And kissed him, for love, not money, but only once.

II

My grandmother had a bite like a sour green apple,
Little and pitiless she kept the till,
Counted the profits, and stacked the bills of sale.
She bought the shops and the farms, the deeds were hers,
In the locked iron safe with a shower of golden sovereigns.
She never trusted the banks, they failed in the nineties,
She kept her banknotes rolled in the top of her stocking,
Caressingly, while her prices soared and dropped,
Her barometer; crops and wool and railway lines.
Each night she read the news by the hurricane lantern,
While the only child wept for love in the washing-up water.
She could argue like a man, politics, finance, banking.
In her rocking chair with her little dangling feet,
Her eyes glittered like broken beer bottle glass.
She kept one eye out for a farmer to spend his money
And a sharp tongue for a borrowing mate of my grandfather's.

Once, long ago, in Swanston Street she 'made'
For fashionable ladies, their breasts half bared
And their ankles covered, pads in their hair,
Bustles, bugle beads and jet, dyed ostrich feathers,
You could see their shadows waving from hansom cabs,
And the ghostly wheels turning into Swanston Street.
She had her miracles and quoted them ...
Science and Health by Mary Baker Eddy,
She read the *Monitor* while the dust storms whirled,
And marvelled that God was love; it was all clear profit.
She wet the bagging to filter the westerlies,
Planted geraniums and snowdrops under the tank,
And squashed black caterpillars on moonlit forays.
She balanced the ledger and murmured, 'God is love,'
Feeling like God, she foreclosed on another farm.

She never read for pleasure, or danced or sang,
Or listened with love, slowly life smote her dumb,
Till she lay in the best bedroom, pleating the quilt,
In a fantasy of ball dresses for Melbourne ladies.
Her eyes were remote as pennies, her sheets stank,
She cackled and counted a mythical till all her days.

III

My father was a black-browed man who rode like an Abo.
The neighbours gossiped, 'A touch of the tarbrush there.'
He built the farm with his sweat, it lay in the elbow
Of two creeks, thick with wattle and white tea-tree.
At night he blew on the cornet; once, long ago, he'd played
On the pleasure cruises that went up the Yarra on Saturday nights;
The lights bobbed in the muddy water, the girls in white muslin sang
'Tipperary'.

Now he played in the lonely sleep-out, looking out over the flat,
With the smell of creek water, and a curlew crying like a murdered gin,
Crying all night, till he went out with a shotgun and finished its screaming,
But not his own ... he, the mendicant, who married the storekeeper's daughter.

My mother was a dark round girl in a country town,
With down on her lip, her white cambric blouse
Smelt of roses and starch, she was beautiful,
Warm, and frigid in a world of dried-up women,
Aborting themselves with knitting needles on farms.
She wept in the tin humpy at the back of the store,
For the mother who hated, the father who drank
And loved her; then, sadly, she fell in love
And kissed the young accountant who kept the books,
Behind the ledgers, the summer dust on the counters.
He was on the booze, broke all his promises,
Went off to the city and sang in an old spring cart,
'Bottle-oh, Bottle-oh' till his liver gave out
And he died; she married in arum lilies, satin, tulle,
Under the bell that tolled for the storekeeper's daughter.
Men shot themselves in the scrub on her wedding day.
My father brought her wildflowers, rode forty miles,
But he never kissed like the beautiful bottle-oh,
Boozing in the pub like a fly caught in its amber.

The roof of the hospital cracked like purgatory,
At sunset the birth blood dried on the sheets,
Nobody came to change them, the sun went down,
The pain fell on her body like a beast and mauled it.

She hated the farm, hated the line of wattles
Smudging the creek, kept her hands full of scones,
Boiled the copper, washing out sins in creek water,
Kept sex at bay like the black snake coiled in the garden.
Burning under the African daisies and bridal creeper,
Took her children to bed, he lay alone in the sleep-out,
With a headache and *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.
The girls in their picture hats came giggling and singing,
Trailing their hands like willows from the Yarra launches,
Till the dream was nightmare and all his life a regret,
Bought and gelded in an old grey house by a creek bed.

IV

My grandfather rode round the sheep in leggings, and fed the calves,
He mended the gates, once a month he drove into town to his 'lodge',
A white carnation picked at dusk from my grandmother's garden,
A dress suit with a gold watch, a chain looped over his belly,
Magnificent! ... but my father only grinned sourly and read Remarque's
All Quiet on the Western Front, while my mother polished his medals
For Anzac Day. They never understood him, none of the shopkeeper's breed,
Christ! how could they? They only had a copy of the Bible,
My grandmother quoted it (mostly wrong), and Tennyson bound in morocco,
The Stag at Bay on the sitting room wall, two elephants from Bombay,
Spoil from the trip they took 'home' ... was it a century ago?

The piano where, once a year, we sang hymns, when the minister came.
They had no religion, they believed in themselves, no other,
Self-made men and women who sat round their groaning table,
While all the no-hopers were taken over by the banks,
Or walked off, and took up dead-end jobs in the city;
The farms lay at their boundaries breeding dust and rabbits.
They breasted it all, the waves of drought and depression,
Of flood and fire, sown in sparks from the black steam trains
Roaring through wheat and the dead white grass by the sidings.
Their haystacks burnt as gold as their moneybags, their till
Was full of horses drooling on oats and rock salt, of cows
With udders streaming white milk in the frosty mornings,
Of roosters crowing their triumph from the stable roof, and orchards,
Green as their hopes, tangy with peach, cradled with quail and oranges.
Only the sheep bleating their thin cry on the winter evenings,
Echoed the crows, the scavengers that were our kinsmen.
The woolly ghosts cropped the grass to its roots; the hard hoofs
Beat a track to the end of a world where the creeks ran dry,
The lambs lay blind while the crows ate their eyes in the salmon gums,
And the timberless paddocks blew in dust as far as the sea.

V

Only the man with the cornet, who rode with Remarque
Across his saddle bows, only he loved the soil,
Running it through his fingers he sensed its dying,
Its blowing away on the winds of time and cut timber,
He saw the salt of its death rising.
He said, 'I have a plan,' and rode with it into the cities,
A plan for trees, acres of trees blowing by creek beds,
Forests marching in long green lines to save a country,
Picking up their roots and digging them into the earth,
Holding it fast against the salt and the wind tides.
But the laughter rose in gales from the men in cities,
Their desks shook, their papers scattered like almond blossom in storm,
'Visionary' ... 'Dreamer' ... go back to the bend in two creeks,
Thick with wattle and ti-tree you have grown to love,
Go back and wait for the trees to wither, the creek to run,

Drowned in salt, for this is your heritage ...'
'Years from now we will not be sitting here, we will be gone,'
And where will you go, man the great Dreamer ... dead and the land dead,
Only your ghost will ride like an Abo, crying 'Trees' through the corrugated
iron
Of the sidings, where the rails buckle with heat and men sit smoking
And brooding on a green world, as you once dreamed of Gippsland,
Under the fern-choked water, falling, falling: you tried to give us
A vision of greenness and water, who were bred out of desert and scrub
And sheep crying and crow ... our father whispered 'Trees' as he blew
'Tipperary'.

VI

The women were strong and they destroyed the men,
Lying locked and cold in their sexless beds,
Putting greed in their men's fingers instead of love.
They drove them from the earth, left them derelict,
Dead mutton hanging on hooks on the verandahs.
For them the curlew wailed, the old horse lay
Trapped in the paddock all night with rheumatically haunches.
My grandfather wept, 'Whoa back there Ginger, whoa back,'
Till the glasses winked in the bar like barmaids' eyes,
The virgins in muslin, the pretty French girls from Marseilles,
And a little whore in the rain on Princess Bridge.
Where would they go, rich, gelded and blind,
Tugging their old mad women with them to their graves?

VII

This land is not mine to give or trade,
I have no lien on these sad acres,
Where the crow flies home,
A solitary reaper.
The milky creek runs death,
The wattle and the ti-tree are all gone.
My father went, exiled himself in cities,
Sour as a green apple, his tap-root broken.
The orchard lies a nameless graveyard
Behind the farm, stripped of its flowers and fruit,
Its trees, its birds, its bees murmuring.
Only the skull of a sheep dropped at the crossroads,
And the rattling dray in the scrub on the empty skyline,
My grandfather yelling, 'Whoa back there Ginger, whoa back,'
While I carry my moneybags home through the heart of this country.'
The wheels of the old dray turning, bring us full circle,
Death whirls in the wind, the old house hunches in on itself
And sleeps like the blind, *The Stag at Bay* hangs skewed
On the wall, the elephants from Bombay are chipped by the children,
Nobody plays 'Rock of Ages' on the untuned piano now.
But the crows cry over my salty acres, scavengers come home
To roost and foul their nests in the creaking gum trees.

VIII

Who rises from the dead each spring must pay the cost.
How shall I pay living at the harbour's mouth
Where my father's ghost sits mumbling over breakfast,
Nodding at headlines, full of strikes and wool boards,
Tariffs to sink his teeth into, wars for his grandsons,
Where's Remarque now! His medals on the wall blink
Their derision, his heart's grown crooked, out of season.
He forgets how to sink a well or plant a tree.
His back's like sandalwood, his smell is sweet with death,
He crumbles where he sits, the tide rises to his lips.
Mother to daughter the curse drops like a stone.
My mother sits silent with nothing to remember.

Yet sometimes in the dark I come upon him in his chair,
A book lying open on his knees, his eye turned inward,
And then he sings old songs of Bendigo and windlasses,
And tells me tales of Newport railway workers, Nellie Melba
Singing High Mass, and how he read all night in Collingwood.
Voted for Labor and fell in love with Nellie Stewart.
But never a word of that far green country of his spirit,
Where the trees grow greener than the Gippsland grass.
All this is locked away in grief and salt.
Maybe, in death, his lips will whisper it,
And the green vision that gave sap to all his days
Will rise again and give him back his country.

IX

This is *my* truth, a grandfather boozed with guilt
And gold, who got free kisses from a barmaid for his gift,
And a great horse that swung its rump and tilted the world
down.
A man rides through the windmill country like an Abo,
Blowing his cornet in a wail of 'Trees', bewitched
By Gippsland fern and luminous girls mirrored in the Yarra.
I will pay this debt, go back and find my place,
Pick windfalls out of the grass like a mendicant.
The little sour apples still grow in my heart's orchard,
Bitten with grief, coming up out of the dead country.
Here I will eat their salt and speak my truth.

Fragment of Gershwin

When Gershwin plays on summer afternoons
'An American in Paris', 'Porgy and Bess' ...
I think of you, and see you walking in the rain,
With your face crinkled under your blue felt hat,
Your tall body bent sideways under streets
And steeples, and the golden light
Falling across your hands,
The ghost of Abraham Lincoln passing
In the thin light air, with battered hat
And cheeks hacked out of leather.
And I think of moons that had no meaning,
And were mad and unreflected in a pool at evening,
I think of days that had a rhythm and were singing,
Walking the streets, morning and afternoon, and evening
Bringing stars, people huddled in overcoats
Passing in dim blue air, and sometimes the rain
Seemed to channel rivulets down your face.
Blown hair, and coats billowing out in wind,
Or the still golden air would hold a dream
Where we two walked, a dream unbroken, unpredictable.
And we two moving in the midst of it,
That nothing could break or shatter, nothing destroy.
And then I close my eyes and pain
Rips open through my eyelids, and I hear
Somewhere a bar of music playing *The Rite of Spring*.
Then I wish that I was mad and had forgotten
The moving hush of that warm summer air,
When Gershwin played on windy city corners,
And came from shopfront doors like golden rain.

My Love is Full of Summertime

My love is full of summertime,
With doves a-swing in lilac trees,
And magpies thick as summer leaves,
Singing a fine, full-throated ease.
The gold-white sunlight, thick as milk
All through the silent leaves lies spilt,
The summer birds dart, blue as silk.
My love is full of summertime.

My love is full of summertime
When all things come to their full grace,
And tough and tender time can trace
Rough-fingered on a lover's face.
Wisdom and Death an old man knows.
Life weds with death and dear it grows
Like the slow dropping of the rose.
My love is full of summertime.

My love is full of summertime
Across the hills watsonias climb
Pink as a cloud to turn men blind
With all the passion ever rhymed.
And bees buzz deep in waxy cells,
And children's voices echo spells
Nostalgic as the cattle-bells.
My love is full of summertime.

My love is full of summertime,
Crammed to the top and brimming over
With smell of gumleaf and cut clover
I am in love like any lover.
Oh! time's tall clock ticks in my ear,
I count the days, I count the year
And all to make you yet more dear.
My love is full of summertime.

Summer

This summer I will go back
to the country of sunburnt children
the lost country at the end of the world
where two oceans meet ...

I will walk up the moonlit path
between the peppermint bushes
to the little weatherboard house
with the rusty windows facing the bay

I will cross the porch
pushing open the flywire door
the room will be full
of the hush and pull of the sea
I will see the children
circling the oval table
with the dark blue inkstains
playing Rickety Kate
their earnest faces bend to their cards
they don't look up
even when I stand beside them
they will not know I am there
I will point and tell them
which card to play
but they won't hear me.
My father lies reading
under the lamp on the sofa
my mother washes up
in the tin dish on the kitchen table
the fuel stove burning behind her
the scrub closes round the house
and the sea listens
outside through the window
the light on Breaksea
flickers on and off.

I will turn quietly
leaving the way I came
tomorrow the children
will get up early
to swim in the sea
ringed with black crags
one with a glitter of sunlight
they will build their cubbyhouses
under the peppermint bushes
racing through the bush reserve
playing wild horses ...

one will be shot
out of his Kittyhawk
over the Owen Stanleys
one will give up his farm
and all his possessions
to the Jehovah Witnesses
one will lose his wife to cancer

one will lose her child
one will be unhappily married
my father will be buried
in the graveyard
on the edge of town
my mother will lose her wits
but none of them know it ...

nothing will stay in its place
except the sea and the little house
and the black crags showing
above the line of the rip
that will not stop flowing.

Conversation in Autumn

Summer will never end
you told me

but summer has ended already
the verandahs are thick with leaves
the helpless creeper
knocks against the wall.

Did you know that lighting two cigarettes
off the one match
is a symbol for doomed love?

But we are still talking
you said

one day if you leave it too late
you will be left alone
with all those words in your head.

Thoughts in Winter

cold days in the mountains
sleet falls the wind unhooks
the creeper from the wall

white cockatoos gather to sweep and call
from distant sandstone peaks
light slants snow threatens the currawong repeats
his warning cry
distils all winter in his golden eye

the mountain streets are full
of creaking trains of semis revving up
the town shaken awake
the rain begins the garden sleeps
the silence settles down

dead to the world
in your recliner chair
you mourn for the reckless life
that big men lead
I bleed internally the lines
around my mouth betray
a disciplined sadness
a crow in the distance calls
expands the world by half
and flies away.

Note: Quote from 'Raw Material', an early article by Randolph Stow in Westerly.

On the Peninsula

1

Patchy rain five overnight
the dull sharp snowy light
imprints the weeping she-oak
on the lawn
the blackbirds' feet
scrabble in ceilings
flapping down to sleep.

At dawn beyond the tea-tree hedge
the spindle-shanked jetties
straddle the tide
inside the old men
captured snorting like swine
in the second-best bedroom
bring in the tea on time
footfalls and table talk
furred needles scratching ragtime
through the hall
the empty mansions
and the widow's walk
the bathing boxes face the bay
locked on Edwardian secrets
neck to knee.

Above the shallow shore
one eye weeping like Cyclops
I wait for a ship to call
a message cast in a bottle
a light burning out to sea.

2

Last night beyond the native hedge
tea-tree she-oak paperbark
flattened by the gales
something crying out there in the bay
a bird a kestrel testing the wind
the cutting edge
through Bass Strait
from Antarctica.

Under this fragile roof tree
stoke the fire
pull up the blankets
the blackbirds roost
and fuss above my head
the cry goes on insistent

intermittently
dancing the tides.

In the morning in a grey light
snow fell in the garden
on the peninsula.

3

The nights are drawing in
we light the fire
it burns and smoulders
wet wood old desire
the seasons turn
to winter solstice
autumn's ended
frost on the grass
the rain drives in
the house has turned
its blind drowned windows
to the storm ...

since I saw you last
your presence dims and wavers
mist on glass
I can't recall your kiss
or your embrace
or put your face
together in my mind
only your separate features
are remembered
three months have passed
all memory is short
and totally untended
all love dies ...

eating my heart out
in this gentle kingdom
where death has touched me twice
last month deprived of air
fought on the table
a primitive response
an old temptation
called the grave
said *let it go*
there's nothing here to save.
I have withdrawn quietly
from the world
to sit the winter out
crows in the garden
saunter pick and preen
if I wait long enough

they'll pick it clean
old bones lost love
a life that's lived
and covered over
saluted recognised
in tender language
brutal narrative ...

4

Last night the moths came
blundering towards the light
enlarged like giant x-rays
only one night they lasted
one wild flight
black moths in from the sea
and the dewy garden
sleepwalkers
circling the rooms
hurtling against the walls
to fall and flap like birds.

All night I heard them
frantic in the corners
too heavy to rise again
in the morning
they lay quietly
dried sticks
with folded wings.

5

Where do they come from
poems

come once
or sometimes
not for years
go unsung unknown
or in a blaze of glory
dance in the flame
a moment and go out
never to come again

does an angel
tap a shoulder
promising heaven
or hell

is it death
blowing his first breath
over us wishing us well
a man in a worn overcoat

saying *Try this on for size*
or a woman with long wet hair
both of them out there
waiting to be recognised?

Is it a single presence
has it a face
a habitation and a name
was this the person from Porlock
Coleridge blamed?

6

There was one moment
when the sky whirled
golden needles.
Bare-footed in my night-gown
on the grass
I stagger out to find
the glinting sea
beyond the garden gate
an edge of cliff
a few steps now
are like a miracle
when will I walk again
what days months years
still lie ahead of me?
I have come
after long struggle
to this sunlit garden
this acre of grass
this temporary haven
where I dream at night
the same old passionate
disastrous things
in the morning light
the tide runs
and the hedgerow blackbird sings
back breaks legs buckle
but the she-oak tree
shakes out its golden benison
on me.

7

Out along the bay
the she-oak wind
sighs in with the tide
I have heard it breathing
in my ears all night
to the pull and pulse of the earth
the planets moving
to their accustomed places ...

they comfort me
Life will go on
go out return with every tide
children will play in the shallows
the yellow-breasted robin nest
in the shade
of the tea-tree hedge
the spindrift vaporise
above the bay ...

this is a place
where you have never been
your face is fathomed
under oceans of sea water
running through the Straits
drowned boy crippled child
lover and awkward woman
they stand under the she-oak tree
with gentle gestures ...

a place where no one walks
only the future
fossicking the shore.

8

The square behind the tea-tree hedge
darkens soon night
will blot it out the house
will rock above the bay
mysterious lapped in grey
cloud the tide
will carry us to sleep
and all the wide
salt reaches of the Strait
invade the mind.

What have we left here
when we pack and go?
two ghosts a yellow dog
a tapping bird
the sleepless nights
when all we heard
was magnified the mornings
when the sun struck first
across the floor
the wide glazed windows
and the doors
that opened on the lawn?

I found this space

a square of frosty grass
the sun that left
the garden earlier
each day
till winter wrapped us
in a world of cloud.

What have we found here
nothing to take away
our tenancy is lost
we've made no mark
no covenant or seal
no footsteps in the frost
a fragile shelter
and a voyager
ephemeral and real
the house remains.

Return to the Peninsula

1

We come in the off season
when the rich mansions
the summer houses are empty
and stray cats with bells
roam through the Paradise gardens

the back beach is deserted
the key-holes in the bathing boxes
stiff with cold
except for one slow learner
drifting along the shoreline
in army surplus
his breast pinned with badges

each night I hear the tide rise
but the mornings are like green glass
as if I lay on the floor of an ocean

only the gold butterfly
hatched out for her first flight
stumbles against the melaleuca hedge
dusting the death spots
on the backs of my hands
with pollen.

2

I have returned
for the third year
a ghost to join the others
their squandered tenderness
clamours in the dark wood

at the turn in the road
illuminated jewel-bright
in the last rays of the sun
the sky-filled windows
the washing of the tide
the long pier
reflected twice in stillness
the she-oak
in the middle of the lawn
solid and black and formal
as an etching
the black cat with the white face
crossing the garden
dissembles like a shadow

the last light falls
a hand twitches a curtain
a bird calls
somebody turns and smiles
from the picture window ...

*She's back again
the familiar
with her limping step
and her midnight tears.*

3

I hear the sea tonight
lulling the shore
the wind sougning
in the she-oak on the lawn
and I am back
on the peninsula
the fire gusting
in the hearth
a still-life ageing woman
reflected in the glass
reading under a lamp
in a shadowy house

I stand outside
in the obliterating night
watching that woman
once careless young
and passionately proud
condemned by love
seeing her
in this house above the bay
alone illumined greying hair
and quiet forbearance
coals and darkness
burning at her back
and the fire leaps in the glass
as the weather changes.

4

I am the one
no longer beautiful
behind the melaleuca hedge
beside the bay
who sleeps and weeps
and sleeps again
calling to you
across the drift of time.

I hide in the silent garden
furred with frost
remote and still
where no one comes
where time itself is lost
and the bay runs
like watered silk
through a skein of hills

no one will burst
through the melaleuca hedge
no one will open the door
to the silent house
the dark rooms
of the unconscious wait
in a square of sunlight
circled by the sea

the thorns grow higher
as the birds grow quiet.

5

Winter blowing in
air aches with cold
and red-hot poker
underneath the hedge
nothing is true
this autumn night
that overlooks the sea
each day I write
and walk a little
sit in a path
of sunlight smell the snow

asleep rock out
on night tides
anguished and violent
to confront your face

(Fabulists
consumed with memory
dazzled and dazed
we improvise our lives
play out these scenes
before the magic backdrops)

everything into the fire
tea-tree and paper-bark
grief renunciation
terror and tenderness
I vanish in this land

like flame like ash
dissolve smoking in air
under a raging cloud
traverse the sky
to wake on a cold morning
to the sigh of the she-oak
the fire burnt low
and cry *Burn Me!*

6

Time will end
for me one fine day
or night of silence
birdsong rain or shine.

When I fall
my universe falling
with me will perform
a perfect circle
like the cobweb
with illuminated spokes
blowing wide under
the verandah eaves

they will find me
flat on my back
in the blind grass
eyes open to the sun
a rayed mandala printed
on each eye-ball

while the yellow-breasted robin
trills in the melaleucas
and the spider spins
and circles patiently.

7

The garden behind glass
moonlit as day
the rain walks through the grass
intimate as a lover
out on the bay
a stormy petrel calls
from its wild domain
poems dance
like firelight on the walls

eerie as white frost
the fox moans
by the front gate
marauding for birds

I lie in the still house
wired for sound
trembling with words
found lost found again
fox firelight birds
fish-gut and oyster-catchers
drunken as lords
flapping home through the rain

daybreak the receiver
clicks into silence
the fire dies
to a smoulder of sticks
shearwaters out of reach
falling down the sky.

8

Six am still dark rain
whispering through the garden
the fire hissing through the night
dawn sky whitening overhead
clouds mass and losing height
re-form and pass the she-oak
lifts her ponderous shadow
from the lawn

the black cat slips home
through the wet grass
lifting each paw up high
the first bird wakes and calls
drops hang in diamond patterns
splash and fall
the wind running along
the tea-tree hedge
flashes with light
it shakes a head
of golden needles
in the air
carpets the ground
and fills the bay
with sound and sigh
the dying fall
the beat of wings
like an Aeolian harp
the she-oak sings
and clearly now
under the rain
the cloud the whirling sky
I hear you cry out loudly

*How terrible to die
never to hear Mozart again*

9

The she-oak
embroidered
on blue silk
a tuning fork
for the rushing
of the tide
the fire murmuring
its cold heart
fallen in the glass
I lie inside
the dark house
making a substance
from the shadow

the fishing boats
I heard go out
at midnight throb home
across the bay
all things emerge
the tea-tree hedge
filters the morning light
the daytime moon
left over from last night
in a scud of cloud
there is a shadowy presence
in this room
ghostly interlocutor
where light and shade
play on a body
half-discerned a face
half-turned away
who never speaks
but smiles
with the perfect understanding
of the dead.

10

I summon you up
out of my memory
under the tea-tree
and paper-bark
walking obediently
with your high distracted babble

you stand
in the green shade
on the edge

of the clearing
behind you
the radiant scrubland
doused in light
then turning
hoisting your rod
on your shoulder
you climb down the cliff
to the sea
I can hear you
crashing away
through the undergrowth
the sound rolls back
up the shore

the black cat pushes
and rubs at my feet
flicking her tail
the sky clouds over
a few drops fall
the she-oak soughs
like a sail
I wait
by the wooden stair
leading down to the bay
thistledown blows
through the air ...

11

The shadows of nesting birds
circle the house
finch fantail thornbill silvereye
spring showers wet the windows
winter has passed
death turns to birth
air water light and continuity

the wattlebirds
swing on the red-hot poker
the cat has hidden
her three black kittens in the hedge
the sunlight spreads
to saturate the lawn
the Indian mynahs
turn the earth for worms
against the silken sky
the she-oak burns
gilt as a tapestry

gulls drift through the updraft
in a paper chase

marking the boundary
night falls
with looping swallows
hooting owls
the dry cough
of the foxes on the cliff
sitting together
their sparkling eyes
reflected off the sea
around the bend
the same house waits
beside the weeping tree
closed in on itself
feeling like home.

The Last Peninsula

1

Bright blood on the sheets this morning
in the chilly spring
a currawong sings with a note
as harsh as a warning
the fire in Plato's cave
burns steadily all day
death in his blue cowl
takes one reluctant step away
while the suffering flesh
cut sewn and sealed
lies still in its narrow bed
the spirit looks down and is healed
Healed for what? says the voice
More of the same?
And the currawong sings *Rejoice*
I have called your name.

2

Moving out
on the last peninsula
burdened with memory
the nurturing womb
is an envelope of torn flesh
thrown away
the feathery she-oak
under the heavy sky
turns grey with endurance
the melaleuca fence
blackens with rain
beyond the bay
in a sieve of pebbles
advances and withdraws
with a melancholy persistence
the belly drags
and hugs its pain
it imagines the stump
of the cervix
one ovary left to swing
like a bell
like a petal blowing
alone in the dark
the black hole
that spreads and flowers
under the flesh
in the first brush
with death

3

days pass
the body heals
around the wound
the mutilation stays

lost and found
on wavering feet
the self
staggers across the grass
and goes to ground
the air is like blown glass
one blue-black crow
hops and floats
enlarged in the wet clear light

what shall I find
in this last retreat?
this house at the end of the road
where the roots
thrust thick and bulbous
up from the sandy floor
where the bay
floods to the ocean
with its unending roar

is love a compass
life an allegory?
when the corrupt flesh
sickens and dies
from our first breath
do we carry death
in our bodies
waiting?

no answers
only questions
but the child
lives on in the ageing body
unreconciled
in a garden closed
on a lost and fabled world.

4

A house of mystery the leaves
of moving fingers tap the glass
the grass whirrs with the energy
of secret lives
sea eagles swallows gannets
ride the air

sea beasts in the deep
roll over with the tide
pulled up on the rocks
to sun themselves to sleep

there is a hedge between
this garden and the world
a holy bestiary that swarms and sings
to guarantee the multiplicity of things

5

The garden darkens
underneath my eyes
the light fades out
wagtail plover wren
all creatures that rejoice
under the sun
creep home to sleep
and shall I too
eventually disappear
in a garden hat and a cloak
possibly accompanied by
a Platonic angel
leaving a note

*I have been called away
from the dark cottage
but on what errand
and for what purpose?*

the shadow of the she-oak tree
feathers the sky
the evening star
glows faintly from the sea
and all that I
have willed myself to be
is stilled.

6

Grief sank like a stone
a great wind came
the cliff face tumbled
the she-oak sang
the birds were blown
about the garden

the chimney kicked back
the smoke
till our eyes were full
of tears
when the wind dropped

the sunlight deepened
balanced serene radiant
the garden glowed
the throats of the birds
were full of silver

what is the distance
between
bone and infinity?
bliss pain solitude
a breath of air

7

what comfort there
the world goes on
without me
like the swallow
flying from dark to dark
through a lighted room
the sigh of the fire
in the hearth
before it falls
I die and the lost womb
and the last light
and the dark mystery
between the thighs
goes with me

ignorant and afraid
but without choice
I have taken the first step
out onto the peninsula
I hear the voices of the birds
calling each to each
from the black pine
step by step
while the crow's wing
darkens the garden
and the thickening light
slips from the bay

leaving black water
I will forget all speech
I will have moved away
out of reach
of the little dark birds
in the first light
dancing across the lawn

8

locking the door

on the garden
full of butterflies
the wash of the tide
the she-oak sailing
through air
the golden hornet
flexing against the sun

on grey days under cloud
with the foghorns sounding
when the weather blows up
the seeds dance on the lawn
and the birds are silent
we do not lie in bed
reading under the lamplight
our eyes do not grow
accustomed to the dark
like the hornet the butterfly
and the bird
we cannot stay
like the dead leaves
on the ground
we are blown away.

Alice in Wormland

*they are telling you
that nothing decays
that life is not tragic*

Robert Adamson, 'My Heart.'

1 [She stands under the almond trees]

She stands under the almond trees
breastless with roses
rosellas flush out behind her
in the branches naked fledglings
lift up their beaks for worms
but standing round a corner of the verandah
an old woman in a darned cardigan
with a carving knife mouthes
Bitch! Bitch! Bitch!

Woe to you cries Alice
& *Woe woe to me.*

2 [Sometimes she walks with a crutch]

Sometimes she walks with a crutch
& bandages her eyes
Alice they say throw away that crutch
unbandage your eyes
but all day round & round the verandah
she gropes & stumbles
until of her own volition
untying the hankerchief
throwing away the broom handle
she is reborn staggering into a new day
runs to the edge of the farm
places the plank over the bullants' nest
& lying down carefully lets them swarm.

3 [The ocean of yellow wheat]

The ocean of yellow wheat
turns green in winter
& waves like the sea
Alice carries the morning smoko
the billy bumps at her thigh
the Italian ploughs the 40 acres
the plovers drop down at her feet
with their harsh sweet cry.

When it came back
it was always the same dream
she wore brown lisle stockings
& perished garters

pulling them up as she went
over the paddocks to the Italian
riding with D'Annunzio into Fiume
singing *Bandera Rossa*
winking behind his team.

4 [Under the swallow's nests]

Under the swallow's nests
her grandmother lay in the sleepout
calling on God
her pupil turning milky

in the kerosene box bookcase
the Swiss Family Robinson
battled the giant anacondas
in the sepia photograph
mad Uncle Harry stood with the brothers
let out of the barred room
to squint at sunlight

her father drove the poison cart
like Kemal Attaturk
a khaki hankerchief fixed to his digger's hat
profile coin-stamped against the whitening sky
the racehorse goannas tore up & down the orchard.

Alice had six brothers
one lived in the silo one in the sheepfeeder
one was a blind albino building crooked fences
one peed from the chaffhouse window
in shirt tails scratching himself
only Jack & Bob were normal
living in ruined houses along the road to York.

Playing doctors she hit Marjory Day
with the flogging hammer
a blue lump rose on her forehead
& she didn't come back to play
but there was a girl called Alma
in the wardrobe mirror who smiled
like a demon
& always understood her.

5 [her grandfather was a window dresser]

her grandfather was a window dresser
at The Bon Marche
he swaggered to Lodge to ride the goat
naked a gold watch bounced on his belly
his Willys Knight bucked on the country roads
till he hit a white gum

her father was a carriage builder
like Henry Lawson
he drove the Twin City tractor
battling his migraine

her mother had change of life at 35
haemmoraging into the frayed towels
on the leatherette sofa
she tacked a sign over Alice's bed
I must not tell lies against my mother

her grandmother took her to sit
on the wheatbags the evenings
were full of bats she told stories
about Mrs Love
who stood on the right hand of God
& loved all his orphan children

at night they sat round the kitchen table
eating mutton roasts on the linen tablecloth
waiting for the Albany Doctor
to blow up from the creek
they could hear it roaring
in the line of salmon gums
Alice hung head down watching the world spin
I'm a changeling she cried
I don't belong with them

she imagined they'd found her
under the rhubarb plants
swaddled glistening with frost
like an afterbirth
but she was wrong
the blood of them all swam in her
she was caught in the web of their history
like the tarantula
hanging from the chaffhouse rafter
waiting to reel her in.

6 [she came]

she came
running down the verandah
in her skimpy dress
her soles horny from the stubble
she'll have to start school
we can't have her
growing up like a savage
her mother pulled the thread
through her teeth
the sunlight struck hard

her heart stood still

she wanted to run
completely free
a long way back
the way she had come
but staring at her scratched knees
she couldn't move.

7 [Malcolm McCauley wrote]

Malcolm McCauley wrote
M.M. loves Alice
in the school playground
at recess time
she hugged it to herself all day
the mystery!
as the boys dipped her plaits in the inkwell
as Mr Lewis said *Stand up Alice*
are you a moron when it comes to maths?

then his wife and children were killed
in the car crash
& *he* didn't come back to school.

8 [in the gully under the mopokes]

in the gully under the mopokes
she wrote poems about mermaids
& witches her mother
wrote them down in her copperplate
they don't scan she said
the sea was 400 miles away
a picture postcard
on the blue rim of the world

her mother gave her
Jean Curlewis on *The Art of Prosody*
counted feet & metres
Alice threw it in the creek bed
it wasn't what she wanted
you're so ungrateful her mother said
the tawny frogmouth
camouflaged like a stick
its yellow eyes
burned into her head
& she wanted to be alone

the dingoes howled
their long blubbering cry
the 28 parrot sat in the house paddock
the whites of its eyes rolled up

the breeze rippling its sick feathers
it bit her thumb to the bone
& hung on

at the orchard foot
amongst the paddy melons
Dolly the ambler lay buried
the pullet with ticks
the overfed chinchilla rabbit
the china doll with eyes on stalks
the peke who took fits
the parrot joined them
flat on its back claws in the air
its bright plumage fading

Dust to dust sang Alice.

9

Hallucinating in the daze of summer
flushed with sex & shame
she rode on cloven hoofs
grasshoppers clicked
the motions of the sun
stars zodiacs & planets
swam before her
with a free hand
she would move the universe.

Her mother sliced her legs
with the iron ruler
Great Gawk! she cried
the rogue horse kicked out
her father's eye
she sat by her grandfather's bed
blind armoured figures
plumed & helmeted
bled in the green woods
outside the window
the lamb of God hung upside down
in the stable yard
sodden with rain
I'm as good as ever I was
death smote his boastful tongue.

10

In the Dream Girl's Garden
there were dolls & rocking horses
gilt hornets built clay houses on the verandah
tom-tits swung dry grass nests in almond trees.

This was Eden perfect circular

the candid temples of her innocence
the homestead in the clearing
ringed with hills
the paddocks pollened deep in dandelions
the magic forest dark & beckoning

Giants & marvels would she ever go there?
Alice ringed her hair & wrists with chains
He loves me loves me not
what did it mean?

There was some point
where picture books dissolved
& prophecy was rampant
the shearing shed giddy as blown glass
teetered on the edge of the known world
blue heelered swaggies shell-shocked
mocked and blind
fell down the tunnel of this nothingness
horned toads & dugites hid in hollyhocks
the spotted snake spoke as she leaned to listen
his hooded world-sick eyes instructed her
Alice was driven howling from the garden.

50

In the Gala Hotel
the hopheads gather
the girl upstairs is busted
the manager drinks vodka
for his cancer
the blonde on serapax
pulls up the covers
80 bucks of smack
drain through the needle

it's hard to love a drunk
harder to love a junkie
hustling on the phone
for *just one taste*
his black ghost
bleeds her dry
waiting in casualty
they plaster up his hand
but not his heart

and she remembers
the swagger & drag of his leg
walking through the spotted gums
into the clearing laughing
the green light on his cheekbones
choosing the tallest mast

to sail to the Galápagos.

51

The mafia play Johnny Cash
at the barbecue
the bikies drag their girls
home by the hair
down Wisdom Lane
the molls argue
25 bucks to suck you off
a French letter
because of AIDS
& *no kissing*
the paraplegics line up
in their wheelchairs
for a fuck

Creeps! she says
You've got no chance
the passing derros
ask Alice for a light

she sleeps
with the tortoiseshell kitten
upstairs on the pull-down couch
in the TV room
Jack Catt with oceans for eyes
sings in his chains & drowns
through the last possum season.

52

Alice doesn't march now
why doesn't she?
it was fun wasn't it
carrying the banner
the odd sneer on the sidewalk
if you ran after the paddywagon

a night in the cells
cooling it off with the molls
you too could be martyred
batons thudding
knee in the crotch
on the colour telly
she sees it murmuring
Bastards!
turning aside to take her Indocid
is it true
that her knees gave out
or only her heart?

53

she took to her bed
the streets jumping
15 year olds on smack
soliciting
she thought about pills
high buildings
even THE GAP
but it seemed old-fashioned
the semis rumbled
like Opera Houses
across the Harbour Bridge

her marriage was fragile
Jack Catt was a stranger
she'd once married
her children watched
from the doorway
unable to reach her

she drove off to the coast
with a dark man
addicted to everything
he said she had
saved his life
now it was her turn
at night in his sleep

he buried his head
& cried once
they drank Veuve Cliquot
looking out over the lake
the green flats moonlighted
a wagtail hopping & chirping
Nim's restless ghost
prawning for bait
ran down the beach
arms flapping
dwindling in wet jeans

she wished she could
dissolve like foam
on the shore ...

The Grim Reaper
withdrew across the water
Au revoir called Alice
till next time.

54

the last of her children

the long-haired son
his girl & his harp
dressed like the Pied Piper
Willow in Sussex
writing her PhD
Rosa in Sydney in love
enrolled in Anthropology

when her eldest left home
she sat on his bed
hugging his hockey jumper
& weeping
when her second
(her beauty her wild one)
married the parson's daughter
she wept again

now she's used to it
they sit facing each other
alone in the empty house
after 25 years
there will be no more children

she hated the menopause
the end of that rhythm
left her askew forever
she wanted blood
a man's seed swelling
her belly ...

in the bed on the Yarra bank
they whispered *Annabelle Lee*
he had to turn out early
to pick up a ship

in his matador truck
they drove back across the desert
to the thin city
dazed by distance
a mirage
on the banks of the river
to live in the backyards
of the bourgeoisie

the big man with cat's eyes
in a double-breasted suit
with bell-bottomed trousers
who sat all night in the Eye Hospital
watching her with compassion
she knew she could trust him
if I go blind she said

you'll slip me the overdose?

he wanted love
& he wanted a ship
but they couldn't be reconciled
one day when it was too late
he would blame her for it.

55

Bluey Blood is dead
to the sound of musak
his eldest son
pushes the incinerator button

we wish him well he says
smoke pours
as ashes scatter on Tweed Heads

mourned for 26 years
the lips sucking
milk from her swollen breasts
the body leaning
to the Harley's swerve
in Dark's Forest
the Buick coughing
kerosene fumes
down Marriott Street

a flat as impersonal
as a motel room
crutches oxygen tanks
a roneod leaflet headed

ROBOTS OF TWEED HEADS
WAKE UP TO YOURSELVES

he used to hassle them
in the pubs his brother says

3 hard porn magazines
a packet of french letters
a monastic single bed
How to Live Longer
open on the laminex table

discovered by fishermen
after 2 weeks rotting
into the fiery furnace
the Gap churning
at Watson's Bay
a little bat

on the stairs
flapping ...

3 trips to the tip
& a life is obliterated

grey heads in the pew
See you at the next funeral.

56

In the painter's studio
the black cat stretches
the abstract canvases
catch Streeton's light

& he's back
with his innocent cunning
his devil's knack
with the cards
catching killer prawns
in loose water
off Long Nose Point
showing her
the dark stretch of land
across the harbour
where Webb went mad

sober for 7 weeks
he's off the wagon
under the table
like a hedge or a hoop
he weeps for a poem
to write & no madness

as the dawn whitens on the freeway
he tips back the car seat
his mouth round her nipple
makes the truckies laugh

from the pack of cards
he used at the Chinese gamblers
he deals her the ace of hearts
he holds the joker

Nim & Alice
driving through Sydney
under the golden light
& the cubist skyscrapers.

57

the light on the Harbour

the stillness in Balmain
she thought
have I the strength
to leave him
with my life intact?

the world went black

in the painter's bed
on the coldest night
for 40 years
she masturbated him
to bring him peace
while he wept
for the other woman

if you still love me
he said
after this is over

the tugs chugged
by the windows
3 lights on the prow
the wash broke
in soft waves
against the boatshed wall
the abstract canvases
glowed in the half-dark

I love you more than earth
more than my dreams
he said

time passed
she thought
how hard love was
what torment

yet knew
she'd wait for him

till hell froze over
he said
I'll be here at the end.

58

Hell froze over
the night came down
as Nim betrayed her
the child in Alice died
her grief was speechless

midnight struck
she stood in the bathroom
13 pills in the pack
is that enough she thought
or will they drag me back?
she thought about love
its torment
ached in her gut

O death said Alice
let me go fast & blithely
& let him weep
Jack Catt & all her children
thronged stricken & wild
Blake's angles rustled
like discarded paper

Alice they cried
you are the great betrayer
live by the gift of tongues
grow old endure & die

59

all night
in the boatshed
they fought
to the edge
of the death of love

knew all the words
the phrases
sick with use
the dreary lies
each time
they drew back

she pounded him
his chest his face
her fury his hands
on the other body
his ageing hippy
she puts no pressure
on me said Nim
(the great Romantic!)

like a spoilt child
he threw the chairs
& punched the table
he called it freedom
she called it betrayal

you stubborn bitch!
he cried
she thought
now I'm the wife

it's role reversal
he said
*we must be careful
with each other.*

10 days have passed
under my breastbone
there is a huge
knot in my belly
a cancer of love
eating me alive
I am pregnant with it
it won't go away

my love my wife

you wrote
*what else can I say
do into you
to prove that I love you?*

fog rolls in the streets
autumn leaves sodden
flap on the pavements
the sky weeps
what will become of us?
will it always be like this
10 days a month
a year 10 years?
(I promised you 10 years)
but I haven't got
the survival techniques
of a cockroach
I want to lie on the ground
dead as a doornail.

61

What will comfort her
is it the voice
calling through the night
for love or something else
that won't betray her?

he says he'll die for love
but she abstracted
taking one step apart

lives if not for love
some other thing
yet loves him still

sensing withdrawal
he'll regret the loss
it's gone
that last commitment
she will not die for love
but live bewitched
by curious magic
sky sea haul-net air
roped in
knowing her divided heart
perverse as his
tinged with this sadness

Alice & Nim
weeping in Rushcutters Bay
for their elusive dream.

62

Nim lay
with his arms
round his wife
in the bed
that Alice bought
in the mornings
they drank coffee

on the blue chairs
that Nim & Alice
chose together
they are only
material objects
he said

but they glowed
like icons ...

when he sat
at his desk
behind the silent
typewriter
staring at the strip
of white water
the TV set
flickering
behind him
stubbing out
his cigarette butts

in the souvenir ashtray
of the Harbour Bridge
he'd bought
on that first day
or the blue cloisonné
rimmed with doves
flying
she'd brought back
from Peking

she often wondered
what he thought about

slipping out

for a heartstarter
at The Early Opener
or had it all gone
into the dark
like his childhood
remembering
nothing?

63

Alice fiddled
while Rome burned
it was too late
to sign petitions
yet she signed them
crab-sidling down the stairs
a nuclear war
said Reagan

is FIGHTABLE

CONTAINABLE

& WINNABLE

a ¼ of a million
marched to the Domain

Nim had writer's block
& fought for breath
his heart was giving out
For God's sake she thought
don't die before me

would she
walk across water meadows
a stone in her pocket

like Virginia
who once wrote
O the happiness of this life!
& laughed herself
to fits with Lytton Strachey
choke on a fountain of blood
like Katherine
swallow an overdose
like Sylvia
that quiet girl
who made ham sandwiches

while Ted Hughes
talked poetry with the men

or take to the streets
in a man's felt hat
& a baggy overcoat
to write ETERNITY?

the drunk next door
beat his dog to death
it howled whimpered
lay sodden in the rain

she felt like the acrobats
in Central Park
balancing on penny farthings
swallowing fiery torches.

64

When she looked back
through the darkness
there was one perfect moment
illuminated like a fresco
herself Jack Catt
the children
in the clearing
by the river
even as she grasped them
they slid shimmered
were gone

at night she slept
in the iron bedstead
fulfilled beloved
listening to the tide
run out to the estuary
the possums slid
on the kitchen lino
the old launch

sank bubbling
in a storm

when she woke
there was no ache
no empty bed
no sadness
but the warm body
curled like a big cat
around her

the yellow dog
with rheumaticky haunches
sat in the long dry grass
barking at seagulls
the jewelled spiders
hung on each grass blade

knitting a thread
to balance up
life & death

the threads broke

& wafted ...

The Hidden Journey

I

In 1952, in the year of Stalin, I came to Russia,
And saw flowers growing out of the blinkers on my eyes,
Saw the statues in the squares with their heads blown off,
The stumps of their thick stone necks stuffed up with roses.
Saw the wedding cake skyscrapers toppling like ice-cream cones,
And the firecrackers dripping off Stalin's moustache in the sky.
Saw a dumb cracked girl in Stalino who would not speak,
Welding under the great ribcage of the foundry,
While the Heroes of Labour smirked in the avenue outside.
Saw a blind man standing on a village corner,
With white eyes and a tin to take the kopeks,
Under the limes and the wind shaking the bird cherries.
Saw a ragged child who ran begging by the train in winter,
While the commissars pulled their pale fur coats to their ears.
Saw a man who sat on a step in a Siberian village,
Naked to the waist in the sleet, head buried in his hands,
Saw a woman with savage eyes who sat beside him
One arm flung over his body to shield him from cold.
Was he drunk or mad or in prison, his naked flesh
Blue-veined like breakable china left out in the rain?
A town of furtive eyes and whispering mouths,
Where men jostle against me in the State Railway Store,
Smelling of sunflower seeds and unwashed footrags,
Muttering out of closed lips in an unknown language
I do not understand: but sometimes in the river of sleep
A doubt surfaced, bumping like a stone, and would not be pushed under
And I would see the prison train pulled into Moscow Station.
Who are those paper faces pressed to the bars, behind the fixed bayonets
And the sleepy young snub-nosed soldiers, behind the flowers
And the speeches, the loudspeakers sweetly bawling 'Soviet Land'?

I went back to mouth my commonplaces on street corners.
We are all guilty, ignorance was as inexcusable
As the blissful cataracts that closed on our white eyes.
Eyes, it was always eyes that gave me trouble,
Eyes cannot be denied; the sullen eyes of the Ukrainian women,
The mud snuffling at the doorsteps of their wooden houses.
The wind flattened the grass on the dark steppe, three men,
Huddled and reined on horses, stared into the safe, closed world
Of the train; hermetically sealed, warmed with pink lampshades,
Central heating and silver glasses of tea, we plunged
Into Moscow, to Lenin's tomb, the black queues moved like ants,
The red stars on the Kremlin blazed through the spring rain,
And Stalin kissed the little girls on the balcony,
His moustache ends teasing and tickling their rosy cheeks.
Mayakovsky, that murdered, trousered giant, legs astride,

Shut his stone mouth on the square, and Isaac Babel,
Round-faced, bespectacled, tender, still cried from the grave,
'The Revolution has given us the gift of silence.'
Who spoke the truth; the old woman bowed in a black shawl
By the Moscow River, who crossed herself and cried 'Peace,'
Under the gilt onion domes of the Orthodox churches?
Ivan, the Party secretary, warm and sardonic,
Who worshipped the Rembrandt oils in the Hermitage,
Tamara, with the brown blown hair and the angry eyes,
Whose dream was a dacha, lost, lost in the green virgin country?
Who knocked on your doors at night? Who hid the microphone,
Behind the gold frame of your favourite painting of roses?
Who disappeared from your street, who informed, who was guilty?
Where were you when they killed Isaac Babel's uncompromising tongue?
While I walked through the streets and listened to your marvellous lies,
Ehrenburg had a secret drawer for his autobiographies,
Khrushchev was playing with fire and a Twentieth Congress,
And Yevtushenko, that marvellous schoolboy, would, one day, stand
Beneath Mayakovsky's statue and shout out poems
Pressing open the lidless eyes and inserting truth,
Yevtushenko was only sixteen: the long winter fell
On the forests of Peredelkino, Pasternak's poems lay buried
Under the snow, a boy named Voznesensky sat at his feet in the fir forest.

Why did you deceive us? There was so much joy stirring
In the lilac roots under the black banks of that winter.
Beside the Leningrad River I might have met Daniil Granin,
Shot up from the war, an ache in his gut, his gold hair
Blowing truth in his candid mouth, I might have rubbed shoulders
With young Voznesensky, dreaming of ivory skyscrapers
Spinning like clouds, Bella Akhmadulina in a white pinafore
Playing hopscotch along the banks of the Moscow River.

II

Spring, 1965, a bleached crooner in a silver dress
Sings a Yevtushenko poem in the Hotel Moskva
Rasputin bled on the snowy tablecloth.
The janitor gently draws the long cream curtains
Against the peroxide light and the upturned chairs,
The orchestra packs up like a Hemingway story.
The lilac, the marble staircase, the ringing voices
Of the amazons in the parks in their dark blue track suits.
The cafe in the Writers' Club where Natasha once
Came swan-bosomed down the stairs to old Lev Tolstoi,
His beard blue-fired in the teardrop chandelier.
Old Surkov stiff on the platform at the poetry reading,
Heroic, while the pitiless students chant 'Where were you?'
The playwright sips his cognac, fat, gone to seed:
'Ah, the bureaucrats, the bureaucrats are always with us'.
The Tolstoyans and the Dostoievskians argue outside in the street,
The blossom falls in snow-white tufts on their hair,

An old, fat, sunburnt woman in a dirty dress speaks French and German
The yellow-haired journalist steers her car through the rain.

'We Russians are all romantics. Do you believe in love at first sight?
That building on the corner has a special magic for me.
I met my husband in the lift. We looked at each other, and knew.'
The rosy light sparkles like a samovar in the upstairs windows,
The windscreen wipers swish, the girls in their red silk London suits,
Pressing my fingers, the pavement glistens, the spires tremble
Like Pushkin's tales, Marina cries: 'We Russians are a tragic people,'
And checks behind the painting of roses that hangs in my hotel bedroom.
The young men in the Youth Cafe are listening to detective stories,
The girls are pinning up pictures of President Kennedy,
Khrushchev is a little shocked man in a Moscow apartment,
The gargantuan editor rolls through the Moscow nightspots
Throwing roubles like emerald rain at the hat-check girls,
The taxi driver reads *War and Peace* in the parking lot.
'We Russians have soul. To understand us you must know the Russian soul,
Have you a soul in your country?' Irena swings her sooty eyelashes
In the back of the taxi. *Have* we a soul in my country?
The girls and boys place dark roses, gently, on Pasternak's grave.

III

1967, the Exhibition of Abstract Art is closed, the young men demonstrate
Under Pushkin's statue, Sinyavsky, Daniel, the poor demented son
Of Sergei Yesenin, are lost in a labour camp, alive or dead?
Yesenin's body dangles from a rope in the rosy twilight,
The gun goes off, the echoes roll across the city, Mayakovsky
Sprawls like a giant on the floor, the Bolshoi whirls with light
The Bedbug plays to packed houses, screaming, 'I am alone ... alone.'
The girls in their red silk London suits trip through the Red Square
Dreaming of Paris visas, the playwright in the blue straw dacha
Of cherries and limes, puzzles his brow over questions of Trotsky, Bukharin.
'They have not been rehabilitated, therefore we cannot discuss them.'
The Japanese No masks hang sardonic as words on his wall.
Yevtushenko washes his hands and the trial begins ...
'I agree with what was done, but not with how it was done.
Should they be allowed to wash their dirty linen outside their country?'

IV

The dirty, rosy, glittering linen of Moscow,
Spreads out in a snowy meadow under the sky.
The blossom whirls in the wind from Moscow Airport,
The taxi carries me with my broken eyeglasses, dazzled
With light and pain, past Lenin's Tomb, the dismantled
Statues of Stalin, the broken iron bell in the Kremlin.
The backs of Sinyavsky and Daniel bend over the golden cupolas,
The black backs of Satan ironically bending and bending,
Wringing their dirty linen out in the sky.
Seven years, five years' hard labour. Ah! slanderers,
Cut out the silver tongues that toll black as the cracked bell.

Sinyavsky carries Pasternak's coffin shoulder high up the grassy meadow,
Mayakovsky floats like a cloud in trousers over this city,
Blessed, with a powder burn on his forehead, Yesenin's shadow swings
Back and forth on the stairs, Eisenstein's voice screams confessions
Endlessly into the amplifiers, where is Meyerholt's grave and Babel groping
Short-sightedly, shabby and plump, bespectacled, tender as blue lilacs
Shambling down Gorky Street? ... I will speak with the tongue,
The iron tongue, the tongue of the bell, the gift of the dumb.
Why do I start from my sleep at Fadeyev's gun going off at midnight?
His vodka bottle stands, thick with cobwebs and dust, under the naked bulb
In the Writers' Union, the chandelier glitters, the blonde crooner sings
'Moscow Nights'; holy city, Jerusalem, the janitor twitches the curtain,
Gagarin sits in the moonlight and autographs endless postcards,
The linen shroud of the snow touches the sleeping faces,
The voices cry out under the red stars like untended graves ...
'We Russians have soul. Have you a soul in your country?'
Which country is mine? I dare not be dumb but must speak
With the voice of men who dream to be angels.
A fumbling at the door, short-sighted, blinking like owls —
'Is that you my friend? Come in and speak to me now,
Have you called to lend me an extra pair of your spectacles?
Look! there is nothing, nothing at all behind those monstrous roses
In the gilded frame, nothing ... Isaac Babel, come in.'

But Lately I Stare at the World

Lately I stare at the world
as if I couldn't get enough of it,
chained to a spinning jenny.

You, over there, who carry on your shoulder
the other one, an image of what-self,
Jack-self, God's fool, more lunatic
than ever I imagined.

Each has his substance, each his mortal shadow,

each one walks innocent and nervous to his end.
Look behind! for God's sake look behind
the mortal monkey leaps and clings.

I have a choice: close one eye and forget
or dare the two
but lately I stare at the world.

Sculpting A Poem From The Landscape's Painting

If poetry deals with moral philosophy, painting deals with natural philosophy. Poetry describes the action of the mind, painting considers what the mind may effect by the motions (of the body). If poetry can terrify people by hideous fictions, painting can do as much by depicting the same things in action. Supposing that a poet applies himself to represent beauty, ferocity, or a base, a foul or a monstrous thing, as against a painter, he may in his way bring forth a variety of forms; but will the painter not satisfy more? Are there not pictures to be seen, so like the actual things, that they deceive men and animals?

Leonardo da Vinci (Notebooks, 654)

1 The Painting

The house yard harbours plumes of rust-faced dock concentrated mainly about drainage outlets and depressions left by reclaimed plough discs. Neglected fruit trees weighed down not with fruit but lichen stoop over beds of offcut wool which in summer will help retain the moisture and prolong their contracting lives. Fallen fences, powerlines from an abandoned generator shed that tether jeans and shirts of double thickness — it falls below zero most winter mornings.

Following the tilt of the land brings you to the creek. Years back the usurping farmers cut the throats of wandoo and blackbutt, red gum and shaggy-headed dryandra bushes. The water flows rapidly now, carrying a frothing head of salt over granite falls. Then moving uphill and northwards you come to the door of the forest, uneasy on its broken hinges. A spent shotgun cartridge sits on its shod foot, detonator dark and gaping towards a sky black and swollen.

A ridge within the forest: gravel fluid against the glacial granite, collecting in tea-tree smothered clefts and creases, moraines. Burnt flower heads shed by dryandra bushes neatly cradle the mummified corpses of gnats and bees, while relatives fan their wings busily high in the damp hair of wandoo. Overhead a Piper Cherokee wanders in and out of the clouds as if trying to avoid the most savage breakers on a turbulent, bitter sea. A hawk dives predictably.

Deeper now. At times the flora tightly bound. But still evidence of the sleeper cutters who cut and dragged, chained massive trunks to bullocks and ripped them from the forest. Jam trees and box poison surround deserted adzes, chips of wood dulling grey. Heart-leaf and runner poison, spotted gums peeling and dressing granite boulders, kangaroos disturbing a pair of western rosellas. Boodie-rat warrens bloat

and bubble skywards, empty now, decimated by the red fox. Black cockatoos harvest dryandra blossom by nipping the base of the flower heads. An echidna curls tightly in the niche at the base of a naked spotted gum. A copse of sheoaks beckons and you've gone full circle, back to the tilting edge. A brown owl sits stiffly and winks slowly as you paint observation into landscape. Sheep drench containers nestled amongst coils of wire, the broken bodies of tractors.

2 The Poem

A room that is poorly lit apart from a fire spitting in the grate. Something reminds you that 'Jam country is lowest and the first to go with salt.' Is it true? Have you never seen a jam tree on a hill or surviving where the land is salty? Should an idle thought project you from the room and into the yard, and then northwards up the slope, across the paddock and into the forest in search of evidence to support this rumour? No, it is cold outdoors, and you've spent enough time in the forest to scan your memory and produce an answer. Surely. In closing your eyes you develop a picture, and from this picture words should flow, mingle with song — the sound of a black cockatoo shrieking to its mate or a fox risking the daylight to scream its song most often reserved for the depths of night. But from this comes a mass of contradictions: donkey orchids flowering

out of season, echidnas climbing spotted gums to reclothe them with the latest fashion, sheep drench drums making the forest verdant. Snap out of it, return to the room — ideas that sing should not be fused with words if sanity is to be preserved. Instead, paint pictures and distil a moral truth from this. Poetry will not tolerate a mix of concept and the visual, it fools neither forest creature nor human.

3 Envoi

It is summer now and the water in the dams is diminishing. Koonak and marron shells mark water's rank retreat. The forest is dry and volatile. The dock with its rust has dried and vanished. The paddocks are dust. A would-be aesthete

you sift the platitudes of seasonal change. You search out a painting to compare this image before you with that of winter. The painting is vivid though lifeless. On its back: 'Jam country is the lowest and the first to go with salt.'

Lay Lady Lay

Six fucks & a getaway
par for the course
I lie in bed
reading *The Story of O*
coiled with pain into a boa-constrictor
they say it's hidden anger.

Too old to consult
the psychiatrist (I know more
than he does)
heart water gall
broken too many times
betrayal is commonplace
love poems are a pleasant fiction.

Drinking Southern Comfort
soliciting in the theatre foyer
I can play the whore
keep goats make films
& cut my wrists
if I take my glasses off I won't know
who you are.

I've flown to Melbourne
taken a Dramamine
left *The Story of O* for the air-hostess
(I'm the celebrity here)
scar tissue is marvellous
& the last fuck's always the best.

Last year the girl
you treat like a wife
brushed my long hair
while you taught me
the art of sensual massage
we drove out of the city
during the Grand Final
the storm blew up in our faces
at Beechworth I started to cry
at Gundagai they knocked me out with a pill
in the middle of my amazing life
I couldn't stop talking
I told you everything till hand in hand
you went home with your young wife
confessional poetry is repetitious —

& we didn't get caught

we played all the games right through
it was easy wasn't it
like a sex manual on a dozen different ways
of how not to do it
do you think we had
a meaningful relationship?

You were the dealer
you taught me how to smoke dope
now my darling I don't know where to get it
& it's hard to be fair
when it's night on Bald Mountain.

Australian Sunset

The red sun
At the heart of the earth
Flattened out,
A broad quivering jellyfish
On the edge of the river.
Red dissolving sun
Quivering in the eyeballs
In myriads of trembling
Red sunned images
Hot against the blue dark
Swathed hills, silent, dark smooth
Rising from the edge of scrub.
The stubborn scrub, prickly
Dark and colourless
Under the liquid plated sun,
Drying up the earth, the twisted
Scrub, sapless and stern-willed
Against red-plated hunger,
Twisting itself with a stubborn
Utter persistency out of that
Red devouring beast
Balanced on the hills.
The quietness, the all sinking
Of the Australian earth
In to its completeness,
Its jealous persistent
Defiance of that quivering ball,
Leaving it dark, darker than
All beginnings, arid and strong
After the red death
Above the hills,
Sinking into itself
With no relief
But the strange, dark completeness
Of defiance, that continues
Forever, that has lost
All youth, all hope, all greed
All tenderness, and lies
Colourless, dark grey
Huddled under the immense
Burning circle of the sun.
Then sinks into its own
Pain relief, its own dark silences
Beyond all blood and bondage.

JANET FRAME

1924 - 2004

Janet Paterson Frame, ONZ, CBE (28 August 1924 – 29 January 2004) was a New Zealand author. She wrote eleven novels, four collections of short stories, a book of poetry, an edition of juvenile fiction, and three volumes of autobiography during her lifetime. Since her death, a twelfth novel, a second volume of poetry, and a handful of short stories have been released. Frame's celebrity is informed by her dramatic personal history as well as her literary career. Following years of psychiatric hospitalisation, Frame was scheduled for a lobotomy that was canceled when, just days before the procedure, her debut publication of short stories was unexpectedly awarded a national literary prize. These dramatic personal experiences feature prominently in Frame's autobiographical trilogy and director Jane Campion's popular film adaptation of the texts, with recognisably autobiographical elements further resurfacing in many of her fictional publications. Characterised by scholar Simone Oettli as a writer who simultaneously sought fame and anonymity, Frame eschewed the dominant New Zealand literary realism of the post-war era, combining prose, poetry, and modernist elements with a magical realist style, garnering numerous local literary prizes despite mixed critical and public reception.

Wet Morning

Though earthworms are so cunningly contrived
without an opposing north and south wind
to blow the bones of Yes apart from the flesh of No,
yet in speech they are dumbly overturning,
in morning flood they are always drowned.

This morning they are trapped under the apple tree
by rain as wet as washing-day is wet and dry.
An abject way for the resilient anchorage of trees,
The official précis of woman and man,
The mobile pillarbox of history, to die!

Dunedin Morning

The Leith is always a loud grumbler
after a feed of high-country rain
and cannot keep its wide apron clean.

Smoke is early, earliest.
Birds wake, test gear, rest,
make a more subdued start upmorning.

On the city's doorstep, light,
diluted with last night's rain,
is taken in, opened, and seen.

Sunday Morning

Salt water is poetry.
I did not decide this
or prepare a statement
to astonish; it is always

my pleasure on Sundays
looking out of my window
at the petal-white Dunedin light
to trace the green stalk

to its roots in the sea,
then say as the tentacles
take hold and I drown,
the oxygen of silence withheld –

salt water is poetry
not mine but the providers
whom I thank by reading
and wish never again to breathe the silent air.

I must go down to the seas again

I must go down to the seas again
to find where I
buried the hatchet with Yesterday.

A resolution

People, heated to the brittle stage,
when dropped in cold water, crack.
I'll smile no more.
Milk, laundry, dust bin.
Sweet people, sweet smiling.
There's no time for this leisurely meal of late afternoon.
Milk, laundry, dustbin.
Yes, yes thank you, I'll smile no more.
I came here to write stories and poems,
not to cook peanut candy.
Darkness comes, with the sun gone down
over milk, laundry, dustbin.

I'll smile no more.
I came here to write.
Grim, absorbed, sane
I'll stir the syllables
in the provided saucepan;

I'll sleep on the innerspring mattress,
I'll turn the key,
pay the rent,
spread protective newspaper,
sweep with the carpet sweeper,
but smiling no more I'll frown, frown,
(milk, laundry, dust bin)
as I write my stories down down
to their seabed in caves of stone.

The sun shines all day vulgarly

The sun shines all day vulgarly
hurling gold nuggets at you and me,
burning our skin's privacy
our last poor wall and boundary.
If you love the common sun, they said,
your guilt will strike you dead.

But love the cherry tree in bloom
that holds no breath of greed or crime
that is purified light in a white room
and you will never come to harm.
They spoke as if eternity
Had touched the cherry tree.

None told me that the sun would stay,
the cherry blossom wither and die,
and when its bloom was shed, the tree
cast off its guise of purity,
embrace light in its common mood
- wear a dark dress of blood.

ALISTAIR CAMPBELL

1925 - 2009

Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, ONZM (25 June 1925 – 16 August 2009) was a New Zealand poet, playwright, and novelist. His father was a New Zealand Scot and his mother a Cook Island Maori from Penrhyn Island.

Campbell was born in Rarotonga and spent his childhood on Penrhyn island, the home of his mother, Teu Bosini. His father's name was Jock Campbell. In 1932, when Campbell was seven, his mother died from tuberculosis. The following year, his father also died and he was sent with his two brothers to an orphanage in Dunedin, on New Zealand's South Island.

He lived most of his life in New Zealand, mainly around the Wellington region, and for several decades in Pukerua Bay, Porirua.

Born Alistair Campbell, he later added 'Te Ariki' after going back to the Cook Islands and discovering his grandfather had ties to chiefdom. In his grandfather's honour, Campbell added Te Ariki (the chief) to his name. He attended Otago Boys' High School in Dunedin, and then studied at the University of Otago and Victoria University of Wellington. At University he became good friends with James K. Baxter, another famous New Zealand poet. He became a member of the Wellington Group in 1950s. The group was just an affiliation of a number of writers who mostly shared a common opposition to Allen Curnow's, another notable New Zealand writer, ideas and writings.

His first wife was poet, Fleur Adcock, from whom he was later divorced. His second wife, Aline Margaret (Meg) Anderson, was also a poet.

Alistair had a total of 5 children, two with Fleur and the other three with Meg.

From 1976 to 1979, he was the President of the New Zealand branch of PEN-International.

His poem, *The Return*, was set to electronic music by Douglas Lilburn.

Gallipoli Peninsula

It was magical when flowers
appeared on the upper reaches –
not that we saw much of the upper reaches.
But when we did,
we were reminded of home
when spring clothed the hills with flowers.
The dead lying among them
seemed to be asleep.
I can never forget the early mornings,
before the killings started up,
when the sea was like a mirror
under little wisps of cloud
breathing on its surface, so dazzling
it hurt the eye.
and the ships, so many of them,
they darkened the sea.
But the evenings too were magical,
with such hues in the sky
over Macedonia,
so many colours, gold bars,
green, red, and yellow.
We noticed these things,
when the firing stopped and we had respite.
It was good to feel,
during such moments,
that we were human beings once more,
delighting in little things,
in just being human.

Dreams, Yellow Lions

When I was young
I used to dream of girls
and mountains.

Now it is water I dream of,
placid among trees, or lifting
casually on a shore.

Where yellow lions come out
in the early morning
and stare out to sea.

Purple chaos

‘Chaos is purple,’ you said.
‘A painter’s phrase,’ I said,
disagreeing.
‘Chaos is a colourless force
tossing up stars, flowers
and children,
and has no beginning
and no end.’
But lying in bed,
washed up,
I know you are right.
You were talking of something else –
You were talking of death.
Purple chaos has surged through me,
leaving me stranded –
a husk,
an empty shell
on a long whit swerving beach.

Something has died,
something precious has died.
It may have been a flower,
a star,
it may have been a child –
but whatever it was, my love,
it seems to have died.

Gathering Mushrooms

Dried thistles hide his face.
Look closely –
that's your enemy.
Ants carry away his flesh,
but still he grins.
You know him by his thumbs,
round and white,
breaking the earth like mushrooms,
coated with fine sand.

A bony finger flicks a bird
into your face,
daises snap at your heels,
nostrils
flare in the ground
that you believed was solid –
and a dark wind rides
the whinnying tussock up the hillside.

Gather your mushrooms then,
and, if you dare,
ignore the thin cries of the dammed
issuing through the gills.

Sick of running away,
you drop in the soaking grass.
Through tears
you watch a snail climbing a straw
that creaks and bends
under its weight,
and note how tenderly it lifts
upon its shoulder
the fallen weight of the sky.

Blue Rain

Blue rain from a clear sky.
Our world a cube of sunlight –
but to the south
the violet admonition
of thunder.

Innocent as flowers,
your eyes with their thick lashes
open in green surprise.

What have we to fear?
Frost and a sharp wind
reproach us,
and a tall sky pelts the roof
with blue flowers.

You and I in bed, my love,
heads leaning together,
merry as thieves
eating stolen honey –
what have we to fear
but a borrowed world
collapsing all about us
in blue ruins?

At a fishing settlement

October, and a rain-blurred face,
And all the anguish of that bitter place.
It was a bare sea-battered town,
With its one street leading down
On to a shingly beach. Sea winds
Had long picked the dark hills clean
Of everything but tussock and stones
And pines that dropped small brittle cones
On to a soured soil. And old houses flanking
The street hung poised like driftwood planking
Blown together and could not outlast
The next window-shuddering blast
From the storm-whitened sea.
It was bitterly cold; I could see
Where muffled against gusty spray
She walked the clinking shingle; a straw
Dog whimpered and pushed a small
Wet nose into my hand – that is all.
Yet I am haunted by that face,
That dog, and that bare bitter place.

VINCENT BUCKLEY

1925 – 1988

Vincent Buckley was born at Romsey, in the Macedon Ranges, Victoria, on 8 July 1925. He was educated by the Jesuits in Melbourne and at the Universities of Melbourne (B.A., M.A.) and Cambridge. In 1958 he was appointed Lockie Fellow in the English Department at Melbourne University, and was subsequently awarded a personal Chair in 1967. From 1961–1963 he was also poetry editor of *The Bulletin*. He died in Melbourne on 12 November 1988.

Buckley was a central figure in the contemporary, somewhat academic style of poetry that developed at the University of Melbourne in the 1950s and 60s. His first book of poems was *The World's Flesh* (1954), and he went on to publish and edit over a dozen books of poetry, essays and criticism, as well as an autobiographical memoir, *Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades* (1983). His best-known book of poems is *Golden Builders and Other Poems* (1976). Buckley won several major literary awards for his poetry including the Christopher Brennan award (1982), the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal (1962, for *Masters in Israel*), and, posthumously, the John Bray award (1992, for *Last Poems*). Buckley was deeply interested in Irish politics, culture, and history, and spent much of his later years in Ireland. In 1993, the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize, awarded alternately to Australian and to Irish poets, was established in his memory by the University of Melbourne.

The good days begin

The good days begin with light sun
bringing steel out of the frosty grass
and sweeps of parrots, bright as a fruit market,
are guessing that the air will not reach thirty
as they slow down, wheel, and count themselves.
Above them then, the cockatoos, even louder,
go compensating for their fate, their whiteness.
You can see how the noon will shape up, and the evening
begin, with its yellow styling and a sulphur edge on the dusk.

Smudged together, the new grass and the old
slept rough all night.
Now the cold picks them apart
like the strands of a rug
into cut, pale colours.
On the muddy bank above them
nettles grow, thick as strawberries.

Spring's Come

Spring's come, but not the cleanliness,
the wind brushes dirt in corners,
and the tiny black seed pods
seem covered with drapes of cobweb,
leaf-slivers, and dried matter,
the whole growing like a set of mobiles.
Time to enter, Botticelli-woman,
with the light on your shoulder
and the strong leg forward
protecting the sacred place.

Seasons

One page turns on to the next;
you hear them crick, burn,
their beautiful unfolded rhythms
curl down in caesuras.

While out in the giant mist the traffic
burls like a toy, the fog settles down
head high like a weight of leaves
on midnight's streaks of colour

so that, by the morning,
your clothes stick to you like clouds —
something no one planned, an autumn
too hot to burn leaves.

Summer has grown onto your skin,
summer grows from the moss like a jungle,
summer on the hook, nets
the banana passionflower,

vine and tendrils
one thick freight of green
carried on windowpane and screens,
buffeting at the trellis

and on the poles a flask of wasps
hangs, starting to move downwards,
and the foreign breezes flick the garden
to a smell strong as vegemite

strong and drying out. In such dryness
it has all gone dark with the sun.

Deep of Evening

for Tim Kelly

You see the children
running in their loose ellipses;
they touch base, rise and fall,
nerves planned like animals;
branches touched by the pane,
spokes brightening in the wheel.

You have polished and arranged,
set the day straight for hours,
and now you can appear to let time happen
as your ear waits uneasily
on the house shifting, or the cat-squeal
of a nail in timber. Night coming.
Patience is a brand of courage.

What we wait for is the cool change,
the Cool. The small towns'
version of the Spirit, their sweating on it
a service of the mystery.
For someone born in hot places
the main thing is to last,
to come loping
up long vistas like the young cricketer
you still seem: the soul
still pushing forward, leaf by leaf,
walking upright. In whatever season.

Now at midsummer, filaments
glow, in the light dusk, cayenne red;
we have cooled down into thunder;
and the rain comes, light rain, the bowl of
the hills washed with lightning,
the water's moss smell, the trees
agleam like wires
in sunset swelling with its light clicks
of humid air; each node
of matter loosening
in the wet cheeping silence,
the deep of evening.

JAMES K. BAXTER

1926–1972

James K. Baxter is one of New Zealand's most celebrated poets. Born in Dunedin, Baxter started writing poetry at an early age; his first collection of poetry, *Beyond the Palisade* (1944), was critically acclaimed although he was just 17 years old and a student at the University of Otago when it was published. He followed his initial success with two further volumes of poems: *Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness* (1948) and the long poem *Hart Crane: A Poem* (1948).

Baxter enrolled at Wellington Teachers' College in 1951. His third major collection, *The Fallen House* (1953), was published even as he struggled with alcoholism. He finally received his BA in 1956. Baxter enrolled at Wellington Teachers' College in 1951. His third major collection, *The Fallen House* (1953), was published even as he struggled with alcoholism. He finally received his BA in 1956.

His first internationally published collection of poems, *In Fires of No Return: Poems* (1957), was influenced by his personal revival through Catholicism. In addition to reflecting his new religious perspective on life, his writing began to take a more critical view of New Zealand society, especially after he received a 1958 UNESCO stipend that allowed him to travel extensively in Asia.

During the next decade, Baxter wrote both poems and drama while accepting a Robert Burns Fellowship from the University of Otago. His radio play, *Jack Winter's Dream*, won him international renown. In 1968, however, a dream instructed him to go to "Jerusalem." Persuaded by his vision, Baxter gave up his job to move to a small Māori settlement known as Hiruharama, or "Jerusalem," on the Whanganui River.

For the remaining years of his life, Baxter lived sparsely in the Māori settlement, writing poetry that explored his strong social and political convictions. After his death in 1972, Baxter was buried at Jerusalem on Māori land, with a ceremony combining both Māori and Catholic traditions.

The Bay

On the road to the bay was a lake of rushes
Where we bathed at times and changed in the bamboos.
Now it is rather to stand and say
How many roads we take that lead to Nowhere,
The alley overgrown, no meaning now but loss:
Not that veritable garden where everything comes easy.
And by the bay itself were cliffs with carved names
And a hut on the shore by the Maori ovens.
We raced boats from the banks of the pumice creek
Or swam in those autumnal shallows
Growing cold in amber water, riding the logs
Upstream, and waiting for the taniwha.
So now I remember the bay and the little spiders
On driftwood, so poisonous and quick.
The carved cliffs and the great outcrying surf
With currents round the rocks and the birds rising.
A thousand times an hour is torn across
And burned for the sake of going on living.
But I remember the bay that never was
And stand like stone and cannot turn away.

New Zealand

for Monte Holcroft

These unshaped islands, on the sawyer's bench,
Wait for the chisel of the mind,
Green canyons to the south, immense & passive,
Penetrated rarely, seeded only
By the deer-culler's shot, or else in the north
Tribes of the shark & the octopus,
Mangroves, black hair on a boxer's hand.

The founding fathers with their guns & bibles,
Botanist, whaler, added bones & names
To the land, to us a bridle
As if the id were a horse: the swampy towns
Like dreamers that struggle to wake.

Longing for the poet's truth
And the lover's pride. Something new & old
Explores its own pain, hearing
The rain's choir on curtains of gray moss
Or fingers of the Tasman pressing
On breasts of hardening stone, as actors
Find their own solitude in mirrors.

As one who has buried his dead
Able at last to give with an open hand.

Rocket Show

As warm north rain breaks over suburb houses,
Streaming on window glass, its drifting hazes
Covering harbour ranges with a dense hood:
I recall how eighteen months ago I stood
Ankle-deep in sand on an Otago beach
Watching the fireworks flare over strident surf and bach,
In brain grey ash, in heart the sea-change flowing
Of one love dying and another growing.

For love grows like the crocus bulb in winter
Hiding from snow and from itself the tender
Green frond in embryo; but dies as rockets die
(White sparks of pain against a steel-dark sky)
With firebird wings trailing an arc of grief
Across a night inhuman as the grave,
Falling at length a dull and smouldering shell
To frozen dunes and the wash of the quenching swell.

There was little room left where the crowd had trampled
Grass and lupin bare, under the pines that trembled
In gusts from the sea. On a sandhillock I chose
A place to watch from. Then the rockets rose,
O marvellous, like self-destroying flowers
On slender stems, with seed-pods full of flares,
Raining down amber, scarlet, pennies from heaven
On the skyward straining heads and still sea-haven.
Had they brought death, we would have stood the same,
I think, in ecstasy at the world-end flame.

It is the rain streaming reminds me of
Those ardent showers, cathartic love and grief.
As I walked home through the cold street by moon-light,
My steps ringing in the October night,
I thought of our strange lives, the grinding cycle
Of death and renewal come to full circle,
And of man's heart, that blind Rosetta stone,
Mad as the polar moon, decipherable by none.

Summer 1967

Summer brings out the girls in their green dresses
Whom the foolish might compare to daffodils,
Not seeing how a dead grandmother in each one governs her limbs,
Darkening the bright corolla, using her lips to speak through,
Or that a silver torque was woven out of
The roots of wet spear grass.
The young are mastered by the Dead,

Lacking cunning. But on the beaches, under the clean wind
That blows this way from the mountains of Peru,
Drunk with the wind and the silence, not moving an inch
As the surf-swimmers mounted yoked waves,
One can begin to shake with laughter,
Becoming oneself a metal Neptune.
To want nothing is

The only possible freedom. But I prefer to think of
An afternoon spent drinking rum and cloves
In a little bar, just after the rain had started, in another time
Before we began to die – the taste of boredom on the tongue
Easily dissolving, and the lights coming on –
With what company? I forget
Where can we find the right

Herbs, drinks, bandages to cover
These lifelong intolerable wounds?
Herbs of oblivion, they lost their power to help us
The day that Aphrodite touched her mouth to ours.

Wild Bees

Often in summer, on a tarred bridge plank standing,
Or downstream between willows, a safe Ophelia drifting
In a rented boat - I had seen them comes and go,
Those wild bees, swift as tigers, their gauze wings a-glitter
In passionless industry, clustering black at the crevice
Of a rotten cabbage tree, where their hive was hidden low

But never strolled too near. Till one half-cloudy evening
Of ripe January, my friends and I
Came, gloved and masked to the eyes like plundering desperadoes,
To smoke them out. Quiet beside the stagnant river
We trod wet grasses down, hearing the crickets chitter
And waiting for light to drain from the wounded sky.

Before we reached the hive their sentries saw us
And sprang invisible through the darkening air.
Stabbed, and died in stinging. The hive woke. Poisonous fuming
Of sulphur filled the hollow trunk, and crawling
Blue flames sputtered - yet still their suicidal
Live raiders dived and clung to our hands and hair.

O it was Carthage under the Roman torches,
Or loud with flames and falling timber, Troy!
A job well botched. Half of the honey melted
And half the rest young grubs. Through earth-black smoldering ashes
And maimed bee groaning, we drew our plunder.
Little enough their gold, and slight our joy.

Fallen then the city of instinctive wisdom.
Tragedy is written distinct and small:
A hive burned on a cool night in summer.
But loss is a precious stone to me, a nectar
Distilled in time, preaching the truth of winter
To the fallen heart that does not cease to fall.

The Beach House

The wind outside this beach house
Shaking the veranda rail
Has the light of the sky behind its blows,
A violence stronger than the fable

Of life and art. Sitting alone
Late at the plywood table,
I have become a salt-scoured bone
Tumbling in the drifted rubble,

And you, my love, sleep under quilts within
The square bunk-room. When I was young
(Hot words and brandy on my tongue)
Only the grip of breast, mouth, loin,

Could ward off the incubus
Of night's rage. Now I let
The waters grind me, knowing well that the sweet
Daybreak behind your eyes

Will not be struck dead by any wind,
And we will walk on the shore
A day older, while the yoked waves thunder,
As if the storm were a dream. Sleep sound.

The Cave

In a hollow of the fields, where one would least expect it,
Stark and suddenly this limestone buttress:
A tree whose roots are bound about the stones,
Broad-leaved, hide well the crevice at the base
That leads, one guesses, to the sunless kingdom
Where souls endure the ache of Proserpine.

Entering where no man it seemed
Had come before, I found a rivulet
Beyond the rock door running in the dark.
Where it sprang from the heart of the hill
No one could tell: alone.
It ran like Time there in the dank silence.

I spoke once and my voice resounded
Among the many pillars. Further in
Were bones of sheep that strayed and died
In nether darkness, brown and water-worn.
The smell of earth was like a secret language
That dead men speak and we have long forgotten.

The whole weight of the hill hung over me.
Gladly I would have stayed there and been hidden
From every beast that moves beneath the sun,
From age's enmity and love's contagion:
But turned and climbed back to the barrier,
Pressed through and came to dazzling daylight out.

High Country Weather

Alone we are born
And die alone
Yet see the red-gold cirrus
over snow-mountain shine.

Upon the upland road
Ride easy, stranger
Surrender to the sky
Your heart of anger.

Letter from the Mountains

There was a message. I have forgotten it.
There was a journey to make. It did not come to anything.
But these nights, my friend, under the iron roof
Of this old rabbiters' hut where the traps
Are still hanging up on nails,
Lying in a dry bunk, I feel strangely at ease.
The true dreams, those longed-for strangers,
Begin to come to me through the gates of horn.

I will not explain them. But the city, all that other life
In which we crept sadly like animals
Through thickets of dark thorns, haunted by the moisture of women,
And the rock of barren friendship, has now another shape.
Yes, I thank you. I saw you rise like a Triton,
A great reddish gourd of flesh,
From the sofa at that last party, while your mistress smiled
That perfect smile, and shout as if drowning—
'You are always—'
Despair is the only gift;
When it is shared, it becomes a different thing; like rock, like water;
And so you also can share this emptiness with me.

Tears from faces of stone. They are our own tears.
Even if I had forgotten them
The mountain that has taken my being to itself
Would still hang over this hut, with the dead and the living
Twined in its crevasses. My door has forgotten how to shut.

Satan's Battle

'Neath shimmering pools of blackest night
That ne'er let in the noonday light,
There lay the gates of Hell:
'Twas there the devil Prince of Night
Challenged to meet in single fight
That heavenly messenger of Right,
The Angel Gabriel.

They met, but e'er they fought he saw
Those symbols of Celestial Law,
The Scales, proclaim his foe
Would victor be; He, to withdraw
Was fain; He opened wide his maw
And gave one last and fiendish roar,
Then to his lair did go.

On the Death of her Body

It is a thought breaking the granite heart
Time has given me, that my one treasure
Your limbs, those passion-vines, your bamboo body

Should age and slacken, rot
Some day in a ghastly clay-stopped hole.
They led me to the mountains beyond pleasure

Where each is not gross body or blank soul
But a strong harp the wind of genesis
Makes music in. Such resonant music

That I was Adam, loosed by your kiss
From time's hard bond, and you
My love, in the world's first summer stood

Plucking the flowers of the abyss.

BRUCE BEAVER

1928–2004

Bruce Beaver, one of Australia's least known great poets, was born an Aquarian on Valentine's Day 1928. With his typically uncanny sense of psychic timing he also died an Aquarian on the 17th February 2004.

During his long life he struggled with a multitude of debilitating illnesses, mental and physical, but wrote prolifically with courage, pungent wit, heterodox illumination and love – eleven collections of poetry, a number of volumes of new and selected poetry, a prose novel and a collection of prose sketches. Beaver also had a gift for friendship, and like Elizabeth Bishop wrote letters as epiphanies that often became a prelude or accompaniment to his poetry. His work, from his first book, *Under the Bridge* (1961), to his shining posthumous collection, *The Long Game* (2005), is a treasury still waiting to be properly explored and evaluated.

The voice in any Beaver poem is unmistakable. It is eerily intimate, at times terrifyingly so. In his groundbreaking collection, *Letters to Live Poets* (1969), Beaver beat the American Confessional poets at their own game, while revealing the 'pit' of madness under the dozy complacency of Australian society and its poetry. Yet Beaver is always warm, even chatty, inviting you to know and share his life in all its rueful domestic detail. Despite his aura of numinous erudition he is just a middle-aged man who suffers from spring rheumatism. And complains a lot.

Beaver spent virtually all his life living in the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly. His childhood was Manly. And then his marriage with his beloved wife and companion, Brenda, was also Manly. The Beavers spent many years residing at the top of a modern block of units. An unremarkable building, which stood literally on the spot of his demolished childhood home. Manly became Beaver's kingdom. His memories permeate and mark every street, much like Cavafy marks his Alexandria. And, like Alexandria, Manly, an otherwise touristified and overdeveloped suburb, becomes uncanny and haunted. Beaver wrote Manly into a phantom companion of his own, from the erotic beaches of his childhood to the 'black plastic monster' on the roof of the Shark Aquarium. Manly was also where the adolescent Beaver first became mad, suicidal, and discovered poetry. At times perhaps his fertile lifelong sanctuary became claustrophobic, overwhelming him with terror and ghosts.

Bruce Beaver loved the idea of the psychopomp. Beaver is one himself. In each poem he takes you on a spiritual journey. Sometimes he is Hermes, strolling you in and out of private landscapes glowing with unearthly energy. Other times he is Charon ferrying you to the underworld, the night of necessary death:

*Nothing but death would ever set us free;
nothing but night renewed our will to live.*
(‘Myth’)

Beaver is a master of the conversation poem, where his unique voice, rich with play and esoteric learning, seduces you into illumination. Sometimes dark, sometimes light, even cheery when he relishes and shares his food, wine, gossip and private view from the balcony.

Other times you are an invited eavesdropper to conversations Beaver is having with himself, his wife, other poets or, memorably, in his collection, *Death's*

Directives (1978), Death itself. These conversations are never stilted or boring. There is an underlying urgency to them. The daemonic dimension, in which Beaver so fervently believed, is either unsettlingly present or not far away. Especially in his later books he invokes potent images from his dedicated reading of Jung, and yearns to revere the sacred “Anima” in his relationships with real women, as well as in his own poetry. In his empathic and droll homage to the American feminist poet, Adrienne Rich, *Poems for Adrienne Rich*, he writes:

*Reading your poems makes me want to
make again. Something stirs in me
that is no longer man-root,
no longer the male imperative
that drove you and your sisters
under the skin up the wall
(‘Poems for Adrienne Rich II’)*

Like all great poets Bruce Beaver is a fabulous paradox. He can write in a traditional vein about traditional subjects including passion, suffering, politics, poetry and place. But always with a Beaverian modernity. A seared flavour far more arresting than the usual modernist or postmodernist formula of tepid irony. And few Australian poets have ever had Beaver’s awe and respect for the other world, where life is nocturnal and porous, where spirits leak through. Few other poets have had the spiritual toughness to report it so faithfully.

I have selected twenty-two of his poems, mostly personal favourites from a number of his books, but especially from his collection, *Charmed Lives* (1988) which showcases Beaver’s enticing skill for dramatic and narrative poetry. In my view his ‘Tiresias Sees’, in the star turn voice of the blind hermaphrodite seer, Tiresias, is one of the most entertaining and imaginatively scintillating sequence of poems I have ever read.

Bruce Beaver wrote in a relaxed range of styles, from short lyric poems through chunky autobiographical prose poetry, notably in ‘As it Was’, to probably where he was most comfortable, the long discursive poem where he could let out his belt on every subject under the terrestrial or extraterrestrial sun. Every poem has his own dextrous savour. From the last days of Atlantis:

*Holding him we felt a sudden
chill breeze on our backs and bare heads.
Evening had come early to us.
(‘East of Atlan’)*

back to his own mystified self in Manly –

*All I could say though
when the blindfold was taken off
and I was asked where I was
would be Manly.
(‘Prelude’)*

The only style of poetry that never really suited him, though he wrote many recreationally, was the haiku. I don’t believe this ultra distilled form gave Beaver the space and lift he needed for his wing-footed journeys between Heaven and Hell,

all the while earthed:

there's a poet still living at this address.
(‘Letter to Live Poets I’)

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Prelude

The only space I've inhabited
has been my self.
Ask me where one street intersects
with another hereabouts
and I couldn't tell you.
Ask me their names and I'd say
Never heard of them.
I wouldn't exactly get lost
if you blindfolded and spun me
around three times a kilometre
from here. All I could say though
when the blindfold was taken off
and I was asked where I was
would be Manly.
Not the one I learnt by heart
as a child, or the other
I knew as a young man
its main street full of good
and varied shops.
It would be the one I call
the rotisserie with its
food shop souvenirs food shop
souvenirs all the way from the
wharf to Ocean Beach
in summer another kind of
rotisserie with the black coffee
coloured bodies and the bare
breasts inviting more than hot
stares. But that's the South
Steyne end we're in the section
somewhere back from that
portion of the lengthy beach
called North Steyne about its
middle flavoured by some
surfers and cultivators of
skincancers. It has plenty of
pleasant trees left pines figs
and gums most too old
and large for their own good.
But the only thing that shades Q'cliff
beach at 3pm is a 14 storey
block of units not a plot
of pines as they did 50
years ago. I was nearly
drowned there when I was sixteen
one year before the WW2's
ending. Sucked out and under

by a rip I was upheld
and tossed on a shoreward
wave by 2 young lifesavers
as true to their title as I was
to cowards. I never swam in
the waves again or body surfed.
That terrible stranglehold of
green coils and black depths
fascinated like a cosmic
anaconda from the distance
of the beach no closer.
I'd walk the shore to see
the women's bodies and watch their
minds trying to keep up
with them sexist and suicidal
at seventeen at nineteen
saved by a fate worse than
death by two of them
at loose ends with and without
husbands. By then a poet
but just as I didn't know
where I was geographically
I didn't know more than
four flowers from the others
three trees from the rest.
Reading Keats and Shakespeare
shamed as much as gave me joy.
I couldn't even tell what a piece of
cake tasted like. In fact
I avoided that word and the first
person singular almost from the
start. I fussed about with what
I saw and tried to reinvent it.
After writing about practically
nothing but love for several
years I tried to write about anything
but it for another 50.
But it squeezed itself
in and I know as much about it
as the streets trees flowers
ocean and all around me
that's next to nothing until I met
you and then I started Oh
so slowly to set about
learning something of it
from you by you with you
and finally got it into
my system and out onto
paper once and for all
but even then it was over
30 years after the event

of events and of course
illegal in its intent
but by then I had learnt
to lose fears of that kind
and poured out my small amounts
of passion into thimblefuls
of additives to otherwise
almost impersonal poems
and finally before too
late opened what was left
of the floodgates rinsing
our landscape known
once and for all.

Myth

I'm on intimate terms with so many parts of the night
daylight seems duller and far more prosaically formed.
At first feebly I learned night's calisthenics
then how to apply them in the arena of day;
that blood-bespattered sand-coloured circle.
Once or twice reprieved by a favourable hand-signal
on whose part I shall never know,
only to begin new confrontations
before taking up the old ministrations of night.
I had companions there, men, women, children
who knew me as their friend and uneasy guide
about the unilluminated beauty
of towering columns and marble moon-webbed pavings.
Some I knew better than others and openly loved
yet one it was I turned to above all
for something like the night's refreshing favours,
an intermittent gift of sweet renewal
all of her own inimitable giving.
The taste of day was grit and unleavened bread,
while bread of life the lord of night bestowed on us.
Only the upturned chasm of the blue
was looked to as the promise of a god.
We exercised on sand, resting and sleeping
in stony cellules like the veriest prisoners,
escaping only at night within ourselves
to an inward and an outward realm of beauty.
A reality more tangible than day's
despite the terrible exercise of power
it was in each of us to take advantage of.
Of course — I see it now — we all were truly
prisoners, not merely alike but actually
imprisoned in the day's parching arena
for the duration of our savage lives.
Nothing but death would ever set us free;
nothing but night renewed our will to live.
For I was not alone; like some half-hearted
faith, unsure and doubtful of its sources,
of us learned to trust each other, telling
tales of the templed avenues of night
and families of their own that sojourned there:
beauty of the children and the deep
radiance of the women, the quiet strength
and wisdom of the men, brothers, fathers.
In all their company that which we ever lacked
reflected on our own terrible lineage
of kill and ultimately to be killed.
Then on a morning like the rest, a body

found in its cubicle without a mark
and we all knew its owner had escaped
into the lasting night and was at home.
Then another and another went to join him.
I know for they met me in my share of night.
I begged them to release me from the day
but each one said the same: not before time.
No falling on one's sword would bring cessation
from the cruel day's long exercise of power,
merely return in another shape and form
to the arena and the stony cell.
So each night as I move among the growing
company of the old and ever new
I know that as they wend continually westward,
their star-centred ways forever with them,
that on a morning I will wake no longer
to sand-blasting sun and blue like a madman's eye
but to the darkening hills beyond the luminous
city, and slowly descend them to my heritage.

Charmed Lives ('Tiresias Sees')

I... Seer

When I take up my position
at the base of the westering wall
of Thebes, it is midday.
This time I'm blind; that time I see.
It's all a matter of convenience.
The first thing I feel is the heat
on my backside, now as flabby
as a worn out saddlebag.
My brace of genitals
are so disordered as to be almost self-sufficient.
My shape is uniquely eunuchoid.
My breasts. . . but everyone knows about them.
The sun is not terrible from this
aspect but the dusty ground
heats up and before you know it
your bottom is blistered.
One of my myriad acquaintances,
a youngish debater in mathematics,
has kindly lent me a cushion
embroidered with the symbols of his calling.
I feel (and see) their utility, their sterile charm
but I haven't the temerity
to sit on them.
My face — do I have a face?
A mirror reverberating
with past and future tenses.
The present is here, at the foot of the wall;
oracular, prophetic, procurative.
Hardly in love with life, I am
its esteemed and lousy sojourner.
My blindness has gradually departed
but I find no point in advertising the fact.
The sun palpating their thicknesses,
I can see through the lids, see a thousand leagues
into the aspirations of women,
into the hearts and covered minds of men.

II Rout

Perennially exhausted, I borrow
energy from the younger
of both sexes, if not from the
uncomfortable
vantage point of the wall, then
from some
rich executive's scion's pad, or
somebody's

daughter's studio — I sometimes
let them
daub me with ochre — my
sunburned flaccidity
soaks up colour like a
canvas. The sons,
profligate already, make
mockery of
my second sight, inventing
fantastic histories.
The daughters paint me with
unsympathetic pigment
rolling their breasts against
mine
and transferring it to absorbent
paper.
I follow suit and we say to
each other
Lover — it all comes off in the
wash.
Too old to be their father; not
quite old enough
to be their grandfather, I hover
uneasily
on the verge of timeless confessor,
too timid
for the whole truth, too bold
for falsehoods.

III Visitation

He'll come back to you in the darkest night
shambling, robust still, not a little noisome.
He'll perch his large object-overlapping frame
on the edge of your bed and unravel a repertoire
of dreams and nightmares. Then from his capacious
sleeve — raw silk this visit — he'll produce
beads of opium from a small box,
from the other sleeve two pipes.
An ensuing sweet tumult of colour
and feeling, pacifically centred.
For the rest of your evening you'll make his acquaintance
as a young not unattractive man. And he will
read you like an uncut book, your edges
sealed to all but this two-bladed psyche.
“The reason why I came to you
was to dream you awake.
Not necessarily to wean you away
from drugs and hard drinks.
I've had my share and found them efficacious
in a disquieting enough fashion.
(I jest, long nights of vision and headaches

no longer elude me after a dozen
lasses of popular wine.) I come to
terrify you, to make you think of death.
our barest knowledge of it just won't
do. You have to lie with it, rise with it,
and then forget it again while you know
it is everywhere about you — you'll remember
just as quickly as you'll forget. In fact
you'll live with it, consciously, and that's
one of the things we're here to learn.
You'll throw away your pipe in disgust
then pick it up again in a little while."

IV Rejection

I visited the famous fifty year old poet
yesterday. In her favourite setting, spring.
She was writing about flowers and catkins
and burrs and spices, looking
admirable (I would have said exquisite
had I been a man). Quite aware
of all the seasonal clichés, she is in fact
a very sophisticated lady. But when she saw me
instead of a welcome she just groaned
with ennui. Then I asked if she could use me
in a poem. Her reply was scatological.

V Bas-relief

You know the king whose self and entourage
are carved unforgettably on a local rockface —
I've forgotten his name for the nonce but this
is often the way with such celebrities —
you'll see me there, bald in a rush-skirt with sundry others.
We all look the same. So do the king and his courtiers.
The occasion was the signing of some treaty or another.
They made out he was far more generous than he was.
A typical king, banality inflated,
he had no brief or inclination to be overly giving.
He had thirty neurotic wives and incipient prostatitis.
He fed less important prisoners to his pet lions.
The more important ones were bartered for blue stones.
He once loved a skimpy boy more than his life.
At least that's how the gossip goes and went,
two and a half thousand years ago.
Long enough to weather rock, not long enough
to help the world digest his crude ambition.

VI Checkmate

The city eats me alive.
Strangely, the appetite is mine.
I stay there because it reminds me
of Thebes: the colossal temples

that turn out to be banks.
The same thing exactly.
I heard that the spiritual master, Jesus,
after my original time
whipped the bankers from the temples,
but that was a long while ago
and the bankers now would be believers
and besides...I go into the city
to play push chess with the experts
in the luscious park — pensioners,
eccentrics. We are frequently
interrupted by a noisy drunk
who calls me a poof.
He knows. He sees through my disguise.
I may have to bribe him
because I'm not active enough
to throttle him.
All I want is anonymity.
Not to interfere with their bliss.
Not to be too appetitive.

VII Old Nick

Metropolis is itself, and frightening.
Especially at the custard heart of Christmas.
I am employed by this great emporium
to wear red voluminous clothes, a cap
and a false white beard. Of all things untypical
to do I dandle infants on my knee
and tell them their future: how this one
will die at thirty-three of narcissistic cells,
how that one at eighty-seven sanitarily
will kill his greedy grandson. Some of course
have no apparent future at all
but will go on partly living nevertheless.
If all are experiencing sexuality
most are merely touched on by the process
and that may be their story in extenso.
None of them tell their parents what I say
because not one understands. I give them trinkets
and so instructed tell them to be good.
This they appreciate. It is a cipher
for continuing rewards. The germinal future
is wiped from their dimensionless minds.
I sweat and curse inwardly from the onus
but it's not so bad being a patron saint
to a thousand unimpeachable children,
promising each shall get what each deserves.

VIII Merging Aspects

Another king I knew had twelve champions,
each chosen for his astrological sign.

My favourite was the Piscean who combined
courage and gentleness but who eventually
was slain by the Aquarian, a mess of
ambition and impeccable manners.
The women of the court barely differed
from the harems I had once pretended to guard:
brittle, fickle, beautiful and intelligent
in matters of court affairs and male intrigue.
In everything to do with the quotidian
they were vulgar, inept and invalid.
This time I had a savage paramour,
a magus like myself with no more regard
than I for inbred kings or their progeny.
In the ambling course of things we made a good
bad pair and parted the best of enemies.
He made me think of love's discrepancies:
how with the best will in the world and a spilled
cornucopia of physicalities
two can pass from strangers into strangers.
There was no intimacy we had not shared
including several of our own invention,
no finer or grosser point of the body's being
we had not explored, the stupra and beatitudes
of the mind's behaviour mapped. Once and forever
our feelings and ideas were exchanged
and the emotions' gamut intermingled.
Yet all we had to show for it were ashes
of the long caress, the brief orgasmic pyre
ensconced three moments longer with our magics.
And not a single scion of the harrowing,
no daughter to reheat our tepid ageing.
All I remember of his individual
features is a single red-flecked iris,
a stem and testes like the stele at Delos,
a taste for wine made slightly effervescent
with minuscule amounts of scented sherbet,
and never the slightest wish to know himself.
The king expelled all of us from his court
in a periodical purge. The eleven remaining
champions were auctioned to barbarians.
I have never known the date of my birth nor want to.
The stars are incandescently impersonal.

IX Employee

She called me Quasimodo
and used me as a stimulant.
She said I rang bells for her
and punned excruciatingly, mercilessly,
the whole time I knew her
as though a disease had wrinkled her mind
into a monkey's grimace, a feral leer.

And yet she was attractive,
this way and that, plastically.
I am ugly, so why did she choose me?
I was merely one among a number,
some handsome, some pretty, some repulsive.
None, evidently, indispensable.
She was literary and chose her suitors from books:
Julian, Pierre, Myshkin, Rhett,
(her taste was inconsistent),
Sam Spade, Harry the Steppenwolf,
and I, the Toad, employed as a kind of palpator,
my feelings finely attuned to those of certain others.
I knew her and her less than salubrious salon
over a period of fermenting months
in the nominal Sodom of Sydney,
since fouled up by the sociopathic French.
She probably perished in the slow fall-out
but I had long since surreptitiously migrated
to the adjacent yet out of range environs
of a self-contained volcanic set of islands;
my curse and blessing being longevity
and the inbuilt sense of survival of an emmet.
I thought of her and in a kind of daydream
rejoined the ranks of the painfully employed.

X Rationale

Youth, you say. What of it?
I could say I was as fair
and handsome as a hero.
But I was always plain. I hated
and loved much as a young man.
Once, I had a preference for women,
to hate and love them ceaselessly
rather than avoidable young men.
That came gradually with my riving.
But who's to say the ungainly
pursuit of young ephebes
wasn't as daft and ardent
as the chase after hetaerae.
Much time was wasted in the hunt,
much in bewailing its necessity,
the rest in eating, drinking and sleeping.
I never gave a hoot for what
they call the minds of either sex,
their messy cerebral selves
or mixed-up Chinese puzzles
of egregious emotions.
What else did I do to justify myself
and my existence to the neighbourhood?
(This was before I haunted the metropolis.)
I gathered their dung nightly and distributed it

over a field half as big as the town.
This made some of the more venturesome
girls and boys I fervently pursued
swear I stank constantly of merds.
The others tended to like my odour —
not I theirs, unfortunately.
Forever in nature one finds the clashing
of opposites. A truism throughout
the system; only Cathay had it
partly reconciled. India used it
as the basis of behaviour. But youth, youth,
I love its manifestations now in others
I must not touch. It refreshes me
as beef tea does an inutile vampire.
I come to terms with feeling
and play across a spectrum of
responses in the ancient game of love.

XI Old Flame

I was friendly with a woman once.
It was an unusual experience.
There were certain innate boundaries
and the inevitably marked frontiers.
Occasionally one crossed them to meet the other.
It apparently had something to do with sex.
Before I had a chance to explain my shortcomings
she quickly justified her limitations.
A woman senses things at once — so does a man.
Though not wholly man or woman I call myself man
because as they say a womb makes all the difference.
(This living in the sphere of double distortion
is everything the priests promised and more —
sometimes they threatened but mostly they promised.)
Nevertheless, we confided to a certain degree.
She told me of varied potions and the effect they had
on people. I told her of poisons and the way they tasted
when cleverly disguised in food and drink.
She was less than half my age which may have had
something to do with it all. She was not beautiful —
neither was I. We offset rather than complemented.
I met her at a banquet and liked the way she spoke,
sibilantly and surely. I also admired
the way her ears flattened against her coiffure.
Between us we managed to account for
a number of politicians and several self-confident
business people. Quite detachedly, without fuss.
We were employed extramurally
by a society of leading citizens —
but that was aeons ago and besides,
she has been dead it seems to me far longer
than I have been alive. From time to time

I miss her, for after all we had been partners
in something like crime or catering, an almost domestic
arrangement, a limited company of two making
the best of things in a world of all possible sexes.

XII Gallery

Posing for Prince Pallagonia of Sicily
was right up my alley. The man
was more than slightly mad and wanted
murals and frescos of what he considered
to be exceptional studies, in the way
some zoos have extraordinary exhibits
en masse rather than dispersed among
the “normal”. Well, I was staying on the island
as a guest of a wealthy family when he made
his famous request for models of particular
oddities to help impose his inherent bad taste.
There was no fee but I of course offered myself
as much in the spirit of adventure as exhibitionism.
The great hall at the estate's edge resolves into
an octagon. Four giant looming figures
hold up a cornice over which is suspended
the Trinity. Further on are groups of animal
and semi-human monstrosities: dancing monkeys
and dogs, unfortunate dwarves, sundry hunchbacks,
a horse with hands instead of hooves, a human body
with a horse's head, deformed creatures of every kind —
but the pièce de résistance is a very large
carven crucifix, painted with fidelity
to the legend and attached to the ceiling.
Into Christ's naval a hook has been inserted.
A chain is appended to this, its end joined
to the head of a praying, kneeling man. He hangs
at his peculiar devotions in mid-air
as a mark of the prince's especial piety.
I was merely one of the many freaks.
I think the prince was religiose and saw us all
as signs and wonders, giving his crapulous artists
a free hand with their themes, accepting distortion
as the true condition of things in a fallen world.
I, as one long interested in alchemy,
was well acquainted with monsters and other near misses,
but to find them cropping up in Christianity
caused me to reconsider its efficacy
and, in a manner of speaking, to broaden my mind.

XIII Sophoclean

The one you made so much ado about,
he who loved his mother in the marriage bed —
this obviously embarrasses you still.
Nothing embarrasses me except the murder

of the truth. I told him what would befall in the future
and why. A plan of the past may have been more useful
but how could he have profited from the patricidal assault,
that lightning stroke of hubris, would it have availed
a younger man's pride, a killing blow,
clubbing the older man to death with his sex,
tearing him open upward with his phallus.
Whichever way you look at it there was
the rape of a life, the whole male manoeuvre
to get on top of something and copulate
a way into death in life and life in death.
And coming into the city on the quitted chariot,
bringing home the bacon and claiming the sow —
I hope you'll discern no undue disgust at the turn of events.
It was all a bit sudden for me even then; I had to dissemble
and stumble over words, dumb as well as blind.
He kept raising the question. I kept on avoiding
the answers (they're always split). Till at last the confrontation
as stark as a shield of figs I brought once to an impotent
general. I said, "Suck these and be whole."
He screamed that they were his genitalia
delivered up to thirty years of battles.
But I digress. The male sees things in cut and thrust.
The female in the strangling cord and potion.
He had but one choice: to try to embar the gods.
This on top of excessive pride brought him to his knees,
and ultimately to my shared state: sightlessness.
What became of him? I think he was offered a lift
by daemonic travellers in one of those foraging chariots.
I was supposed only to have warned him
of "dire consequences" should he take a course
of action. What I said to him out of ear and eye-shot was:
"We both know what you've done — so don't push your luck
if that's what you call it. The gods don't give a damn
but heaven help you if your fellows and their spouses
hear about it. They take these things seriously."
He answered "I know. I've had a good run.
The trouble is it gets to you in the end —
the role, I mean, the hero of the state.
It beckons one on to far more than greatness —"
I realised he was a hopeless case,
a more than embryonic politico,
and left the rest to protocol and myth.

XIV Boardroom

I charted the beautifully apportioned
committee rooms carpeted with claret
pile, the tastefully carved
furnishings framing the fat and lean
arses in their thousand dollar suitings, the impeccable
cuffs and collars, silk ties and linen handkerchiefs,

silver cuff-links in the Cardin shirts.
They held in manicured fingers matched pen or pencil
of platinum, poised to doodle on monogrammed
paper holding the timeless, the ageless report.
All these urbane appurtenances clothing
and surrounding with a semblance of security
the courtiers in Palaces of capital.
I once ruled here from an elevated stance
amidst the ambitious or merely greedy,
good men and true, religionists to whom a club
was an institution wherewith to judge and bludgeon
the independent outsider while piously succouring
habitually unwitting wives and offspring of other victims —
In my orbit a woman was queen and queenly domestic servant
valued above all as thoroughbred breeding stock.
I had more satisfactory throwings of sons and daughters
than that other vaunted royalty. I have tasted bile
and success. I enjoyed the latter for the sun-shower of a lifetime,
then found myself straying from the magnetic goals
that draw together the destinies of the masters of commerce.
I moved into a way devoid of personal power,
a continuous reverie of verbal invention,
half-song, half-lament, a studied making
that lasted till a kind of extended hiatus occurred.
The words would not come again but the mere remembering
was better than an active stand in the shambles,
out there with the prepotently obscene.

XV Andante Moderato

For a while I wandered
in the uplands of Bavaria
shaping a symphony
within myself.
I was totally alone, my wife
and daughters safely elsewhere
but love and the wound of the world's loss
informed and deformed
all my thoughts. Towards evening
I'd walk among the hills
along cattle tracks, the piebald
beasts passing me in pasturage,
cropping and calling, their bells
tinkling and clanking
all about me. It lifted my heart
above the saddest slow movement
I had ever heard. Trombones intoned
like alpine horns within my head.
I had come home to no-man's-land
where cows are calm yet frightened
of the abrupt incursions of the human.
The strings tore me from them at last —

the creatures or the grief-clumsy presagings
of Putzi's part in the death of every child.
I carried it all towards the ascending
hopes of the finale, the jangling
glockenspiels, and a larger calm
beyond the lowing of the animals.
In the dusk I came down
in two minds, two bodies, one music
moving us towards the night.

XVI Cat Lady

Outside the cathedral at five
the cats congregated and I was fulfilled
feeding them. I would shuffle
in my modest skirt and tatty shawl
towards the drinking fountain, its base
sprayed with the territorial signatures
of toms warmed by the effusions
of tabbies. The air charmed by a broken
mewing, the cheap scraps replaced
by a glottal monotone of purring —
my poor ones — so many types
of the single need. So many desperate
appetites. An insane male
human once accosted me
and asked why didn't I think of the starving
children in South East Asia, Western Africa.
I said what if I did?
What good would it do them?
He jumped up and down and tried to kick
my cats. I am known as the Cat Lady
and not the patron saint of the world's
starving, or this city's.
It's all because the sexes cannot
cease from procreating. I saw
on the television frogs copulating
in their green myriads. Sometimes the female
would die underneath the onslaught
but another male would mount her dead
body. In the park the other
day I watched a sick pigeon
collapse beneath the weight of another
then with her last life surge
somersault backwards and lie dead
while the male moved on uninterruptedly
pecking towards another breeding bird.
I have no argument with people in other ways;
I move among them in no deliberate disguise.
I am no cleaner than my cats. It is
my work to feed them, not to breed them.
Nobody else will help to keep them alive.

Every epochal now and then
I know who I am actually. I think
I know who I was in a personal sense. I recreate
thoughts of the past under the shade
of the cathedral's walls.
I think merely of our breathing sanely together.
Only not here, not in this sometime city
of madmen and deprived cats,
where values are all equated with money
and the highest prayer is for power.
I have no prescriptions, interpretations, prophecies.
With no comment other than *Share*
I waddle towards my first three thousand years.

XVII The Incapacitated

Elsewhere than with Leonidas at Thermopylae
(the name reverberates doesn't it)
in one of my incarnations; the one in which
I got my present appellation. I had been known as Aristodemus
but after quitting the beleaguered followers of Leonidas
because of ophthalmia playing hell with my vision
and leaving me in partial collapse,
I returned in a state to Sparta
earning myself the tag of Tresas, "the retreater".
I missed out on the legendary doings
at the pass of Thermopylae in which
the Greek warrior lauded it over the Medes.
I lived to fight and die another day
at Plataea a year later, both reinstated
as a popular hero but still dubbed "the retreater".
Existing for a short while as a blinded drop-out
once again I gathered up my fierce equipment.
The crowd surged back and forward and relinquished
my honour and my quaky reputation.
The wave of their facile opinion swayed them
under my name, uplifting it and me
until Aristodemus and poor Tresas
met at the crest and merging in the foam
were carried over, down the breaking wave
back to the battle and heroic death,
all of which meant far more to popular opinion
than it did to me. I mention this fact in passing
to offset the fanciful stories grown about me.

XVIII Monolith

At the foot of a northern pylon of the Harbour Bridge
I have kept my vigil since the mighty span was built.
I come early in the day from worn-out corners of the area
and sit when the sun is out until the waning afternoon,
thence to another role, another manifestation of duty.
On my way I pass a cavern echoing with traffic noise.

When the sun is setting it blazes up like a testing tunnel
of the cosmic fire at the beginning and ending of universes.
It reminds me we are not that far in time from a kalpa's ending.
More than four thousand million years in the lives
of the starry and the planetary entities
who influence us and are never truly seen.
At the pylon's base I meet with seeming fools and sages,
more of the former, alas, but it was ever the same
at the other Thebes. The great towering stone columns could fittingly house
the troglodytic priests and harbour an inward turning flame
in bifurcated flowering for the known and unknown god
and my own dilapidated dispensation.
The only way the scene differs now
is in the lack of overt piety,
the thinning out of conscious pilgrims passing by me
here upon the seasonally withered grass.

Poems for Adrienne Rich

(I)

Wonderful woman, proud to be a person
in this day and age of swapped sexes.
To feel love for one's own kind
(sex is just an arbitrary accident) —
always clinical the other,
the open-hearted surgery of love
between mere opposites in most things malleable,
a never quite melding agreement
to disagree on most things in life.
And yet you were friends with what
sounds like a “perfect partner” for
half of your life; a “good match”, productive
for both of you, even redolent
with healthy children. You've had
the best and worst of all possible worlds:
wife, mother, poet, lover, a piercing
intellect and a truly inventive
art. I can only envy in a friendly way
your giftedness. I heard you interviewed
on that poor rat-bag of usually second-rate
opinions the radio by a talented
journalist on lisping leave from the hell
of Zagreb. Your quiet, calm and yes
charming replies sent me after your books
when I had previously thought you
not only immune from but averse to
all men. Not quite, it seems.
You'll talk with some who'll listen to
their dreams and yours. O stay alive
good lady. We all have need of you
and every book of fine poems
from the fecund fingers of your writing hand.

(II)

Reading your poems makes me want to
make again. Something stirs in me
that is no longer man-root,
no longer the male imperative
that drove you and your sisters
under the skin up the wall
down which courses the wailing
and weeping of a myriad women.
Survival of wits is hard come-by
in this world of warring families.
We know there are too many people
here including ourselves and that each

appears to have the right to be so.
Ah love what is your true form,
your true self among five billion selves?
As you and I age (we were born
a year apart) I pray your health
holds together. Mine has collapsed
from the congenital start.
And yet I lived to write and love a lot.
Not with your fiery vision of words,
your smoky camouflaging of pain.
And such anger held in barest
check. Dear God forgive the males
who ploughed your sensibilities
like an open field, sowing rocks.
And the women — the later lovers
who didn't quite rise to your
occasions (I tend to think in cliches
now I am only half alive). I didn't mean
to obtrude in this your poem. But
we are quite personal in what we write
and the world may eventually be
a tiny bit the better for our speaking
out of ourselves.

(III)

As you say in another way somewhere
men just drop women gradually
wear-out. The men all nose-dive
out of life after getting all entangled
in it like a massive spider-web
sticky with their own self-pity at
their always predictable predicament.
The women after losing them learn
new loves, new lives, for sometimes
quite a long while then into the earth,
that ash-can for used up humans.
Sometimes a couple stays together
a man and a woman, a man and a man,
a woman and a woman, your latter
way. But the pain of loss, of one's
potency or a whole partner, remains
with you for the fragmentary whole
of life. It takes some getting used to,
life, then death. Between the two of them
we don't quite know who or what we
are this or any other time it suits
the cosmos to renege on our aspirations.

(IV)

Sometimes you spit chips
of fire and ice into your poems.

At other times tendresse blesses them
like a visiting angel.
But the anger is not devilish
just very harsh, exacerbatedly human.
I find myself wanting to meet you
in your work. I read you over
and over until the poems become
like another voice in my mind,
never my own. Yours is too honest
to ever resemble my inner monologues.
Yours is a dialogue with death and life,
the latter uppermost. You will cling,
limpet lady, to your loves and
detestations until your always
ascending rocket of self burns out.
I doubt I will live to see it. I don't
want to. I want to witness your
continuing dispensation among the poets,
the magic of the age.

(V)

Halfway through one of your longer poems
I paused for the breath of these words, unclamorous
to come onto the page. As it happens
this minor poem is happening now.
I know you are part semitic as I, your father was Jewish.
We see most things clearly but I not as wholly as you.
Reading aloud that last bit would sound as though
I thought you "holier than thou". That wasn't my intention.
Just to let the small part of a world that gets around
to eventually reading some of the stuff I write —
chiefly this: that you do see a difficult world
clear and whole most of the time. This is worthy
of more than applause, mere bravos and hands rattling together.
You deserve the fullest allegiance we can bring to the reading
of your vision of this, the afflicted world and all
its afflicted denizens, chiefly human. Though broken spouted
teapots and varied familial bric-a-brac figure in
its totality. I can't come to easy terms seeing things
like these effortlessly with you but that's the way it is,
the way they are, and I along with them awkwardly
fitted to something like a role in a bad play,
not comic, not tragic, just endlessly, kaleidoscopically bad;
a shaken shambles of the half-real unreality.

Letters to Live Poets

(I)

God knows what was done to you.
I may never find out fully.
The truth reaches us slowly here,
is delayed in the mail continually
or censored in the tabloids. The war
now into its third year
remains undeclared.
The number of infants, among others, blistered
and skinned alive by napalm
has been exaggerated
by both sides we are told,
and the gas does not seriously harm
does not kill but is merely
unbearably nauseating.
Apparently none of this
is happening to us.

I meant to write to you more than a
ago. Then there was as much to hear,
as much to tell.
There was the black plastic monster
prefiguring hell
displayed on the roof
of the shark aquarium at the wharf.
At Surfers' Paradise were Meter Maids
glabrous in gold bikinis.
It was before your country's
president came among us like a formidable
virus. Even afterwards —
after I heard (unbelievably)
you had been run down on a beach
by a machine
apparently while sunning yourself;
that things were terminal again —
even then I might have written.

But enough of that. I could tell by the tone
of your verses there were times
when you had ranged around you,
looking for a lift from the gift horse,
your kingdom for a Pegasus.
But to be trampled by the machine
beyond protest...

I don't have to praise you; at least
I can say I had ears for your voice

but none of that really matters now.
Crushed though. Crushed on the littered sands.
Given the *coup de grace* of an empty beer can,
out of sight of the “lordly and isolate satyrs”.
Could it have happened anywhere else
than in your country, keyed to obsolescence?

I make these words perform for you
knowing though you are dead, that you “historically
belong to the enormous bliss of American death”,
that your talkative poems remain
among the living things
of the sad, embattled beach-head.

Say that I am, as ever, the young-
old ficator of communications.
It’s not that I wish to avoid
talking to myself or singing
the one-sided song.
It’s simply that I’ve come to be
more conscious of the community
world-wide, of live, mortal poets.
Moving about the circumference
I pause each day
and speak to you and you.
I haven’t many answers, few
enough; fewer questions left.
Even when I’m challenged “Who
goes there?” I give ambiguous
replies as though the self linking
heart and mind had become a gap.

You see, we have that much in common
already. It’s only when I stop
thinking of you living I remember
nearby our home there’s an aquarium
that people pay admission to,
watching sharks at feeding time:
the white, jagged rictus in the grey
sliding anonymity,
faint blur of red through green,
the continually spreading stain.

I have to live near this, if not quite with it.
I realize there’s an equivalent
in every town and city in the world.
Writing to you keeps the local, intent
shark-watchers at bay
(who if they thought at all
would think me some kind of ghoul);
rings a bell for the gilded coin-slots

at the Gold Coast;
sends the president parliament's head on a platter;
writes Vietnam like a huge four-letter
word in blood and faeces on the walls
of government; reminds me when
the intricate machine stalls
there's a poet still living at this address.

(VI)

Pain, the problem of, not answered
by dogma, orthodox or other-
wise. The only problem being
how to bear with. You may have an
answer ready. I, only the
long-winded question breaking words
up and down the crooked line,
the graph of pain. Burns got it
in the neck. That's where it gets me.
Coleridge wrote "My sole sensuality
was not to be in pain!"

Some of us are supposed to sing
when it's bad. Old Graves says he
whistled once with it white-hot.
Beethoven maybe wrote the "even"
symphonies when he was at odds with
feeling. At midnight Nietzsche's eyes
turned red with it. Valéry cracked his
knuckles, succumbing at mid-day.
Freud chewed aspirin,
his cancered jaw half-plastic.
Whatever else it isn't, pain's
feeling. Maybe the most intimate experience
we're capable of.

Tonight my head's clamped and hearing's
affected. Rheumatism's in the
neck. We knew it was in the air
today. All day the surf roared
till the spray was thick as fog.
Everything's salted down. I like it —
the primal salt-lick in the air.
Both of us like the old sea breath,
but she with her sinusitis, I with
rheumatics, ache and gasp, winded
before the big crass statement of pain.
And its talent for metaphors:
it piles up a tide of breakers
then subsides leaving pools
full of little twinges. But there's

this much to be said for it:
there's no falsity in it at all.
There's no ambiguity to pain.
You've got to fight it to the death —
its own, or yours. You don't relieve
yourself of it, you use a pain
killer on the understanding
it's born and reborn again.
Pain shows eternity as hell, but
without it you're dead. How does it feel
to be without any pain?

(XII)

Three anti-depressants and one diuretic a day
seven and five times a week respectively
save me from the pit.
I pray while I'm taking them and in between doses
because, as Dylan Thomas says, *I have seen the gates of hell.*

Once I drew back in distaste from the metho drinker
and his bleary lady friend — you've seen them
weaving a way through non-existent traffic.
He, swollen faced, with a backside kicked in
by what the tougher call life. She,
the terrible veteran doll of Pantagruel's nursery.
Let them pass into the peaceful holocaust.

In Rushcutter's park they congregated over bottles.
Walking, we avoided them as mined ground,
fearful of their implosions bloodying the day.
Later I fell so far into self-sickness
I envied them. My thoughts
haunted their submerged wreckage like a squid.
At their groaning subsidence I retreated
into a pall of ink.

Whatever I tell you,
you have heard before.

I remember Swift's
fascination with the insane. I whistled
Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came
outside the grimy walls of Callan Park.
Inside — *il miglior fabbro* — the best of us all
chewing bloody knuckles, wept dry,
daft as a headless chicken circling dust.
Where are prayers said for him and the parkside horrors?
Some prayed for us, I know. I'm still here
partially, trying to live detachedly.
Is it only the exceptional ones, the broken battlers,
shred me into uselessness? Does it mean
I'd pick and choose in hell? Discriminative?

Like a dog in rut — no,
self-abasement's out. So is complacency.
I'm never likely to forget
the day I walked on hands and knees
like Blake's Nebuchadnezzar, scenting the pit.
So it's one day at a time spent checking
the menagerie of self; seeing
the two-headed man has half as much
of twice of everything; curbing the tiger;
sunning the snake; taking stock of
Monkey, Piggsy, Sandy's belt of skulls.

Death's Directives

(I)

When life was all about me
like a constraining womb
I wrote poems about death.
I did not call them death poems
but thought they were all about life
in extremis, life as an agony.

Now at the end of winter
death seems to be everywhere,
in the brown and grey of dead leaves
in the dull and unscintillating glare
of the midday river's surface,
in the heavy smells from a nearby factory,
even in the stormtrooper's strut and stance
of a foraging magpie,
the awkward rigor of an excreting dog.

So many sights and smells
even a sound or two
of TV commercials
and the feeling of frost in the toes
and the back of the neck,
my wife's cold nose and my own
cold, pen pushing fingers —

So many ciphers of the year's
dead end that will not
in a week or two transform itself
for September's sake but will hold off
for as long as it can from celebrations
of sneeze inducing pollen,
the clashing colour schemes of new
blossom, the pallid blue of warmer
skies, the faintly honeyed air,
the paraphernalia of spring.

Not life or death, just the first kicks
of continuity. So that now,
still surrounded by death —
death of this, death of that,
fly shells in the window groove,
beattle shells among the brown leaves;
death of these, death of those,
5000 in the Philippines earth quake,
3 children in an Ulster family —
I write madly about life.

In another month it will be on
again, the girls will stop hugging their cold
tits, the boys denim flies
will be bulging, the little kids
here and everywhere else
on the continent will be rolling
around in clover grass and on
the warming asphalt. Dogs, cats
and birds will go madder than usual
about their courting. Everything
and everyone will come alive
until summer burns or sulks
its way through the wreckage of
December and everyone celebrates
the birthday of the king of life,
death notwithstanding.

(II)

Death beckoned me towards the beach
the same one on which I'd spent days,
weeks, years made up of the hours
of my life as a child —
The hidden in the warm salt hazy dusk
of summer evenings I'd moved mesmerically
from end to end of the darkened sands
feeling their mush of powder between my toes
at the phosphorescent tideline
or breathing the tired air
beneath the seawall.

Or forgetful of everything but the now
of sunlight and spray of the breaking wave
shouts and cries of the playful surfers
at morning, midday or dreamily fading
late afternoon of the interminable days
of summer, blue white sky and the jade
and opal of the everywhere reaching sea
and the illimitable horizon line.

Or walking forward towards the central
Steyne's mid-point of beach and my home
two streets back from the sands and the blowing
spray, walking beneath those colonnades
and high cathedral rood of healthy pines
where the pigeons clustered and rose to fall
gently irresistibly to the grassy verge
of the path beneath the pines, where I heard
walking a music moving with my steps
withing me as I was within that landscape.

Or kneeling again on the cool sands
of autumn, following the line
of wrack, on my childish knees, shuffling
forward like some pale and smooth skinned
animal snuffling its way from stick to weed
and other relics of the ocean's saga.

It was death that walked with or knelt
beside me there — Death the colour of dawn
or sunset, bright midday or dark midnight
of deep summer when the sleepless people
come to walk within the lukewarm shallows
or sit beside the wall in the breathless air.

Whether in heat or chill air I moved
beside the ocean it was death that led
or accompanied me — Not mine, but the myriad
around me in the streets and every second
house, the simple cottage or the foursquare
block of flats. Up from the beach or down
from the hill I'd watched death knock at many doors
and the dead come out and move towards the ocean,
go lightly across the sand or heavily
dragging reluctant feet to fade into
the neverending cortege of waves —
Until I knew I moved and went with the dead
in pretty costumes or the plainest cloth,
lightly or heavily garbed to suit the season
until the great storms would come and neither
the partly living nor the dead could cross
the battered shelving sand or find a way
into that abyss of the transformed ocean.

The I would huddle in the sheltered room
and make new myths about the life of things
until death beckoned once again
to me to go out into the streets
of Limbo, down to the sands and waves
and wait a while as forever came and went
across the calmer waters towards and from
the perpetually falling horizon.

PETER PORTER

1929 – 2010

Peter Neville Frederick Porter was born on 16 February 1929 in Brisbane, the only son of William Porter, a fabric and Manchester salesman, and his wife Marion (née Main). Deeply affected by the death of his mother when he was only nine years old, Porter was sent as a boarder to Church of England Grammar School in Brisbane, where he was bullied and became deeply unhappy, and then from 1941–1946, to Toowoomba Grammar School. After leaving school, he took up a reporting cadetship in Brisbane with the *Courier-Mail*, but was fired after only a year. He began writing poetry in this period and quickly became prolific, though his poems remained unpublished. After working in several other jobs in Brisbane, including in a textile warehouse, he decided to leave Australia for England in 1951.

Porter settled in London, working occasional jobs as a clerk, bookseller, and advertising copywriter. He initially associated with other Australian expatriates, and developed a reputation as a *bon vivant* and witty raconteur. This persona masked deep personal instability, however, and after a nervous breakdown and suicide attempts, Porter returned to Australia in 1954. He quickly realised that this was not the home he sought, and returned to London within the year. Back in England, an important stage of Porter's development as a poet occurred when he started attending meetings of "the Group", an informal literary society established by Philip Hobsbaum, a disciple of the influential Cambridge academic and literary critic F. R. Leavis, where poets met to discuss and workshop their works in line with Leavisite ideas of literary value. Regularly attending "the Group" workshops from 1955 to 1965, Porter gained confidence in his own talent. He had published only a few poems in English literary journals before his first collection, *One Bitten, Twice Bitten*, was issued by a small London publisher, Scorpion Press, in 1961. The collection was well-received, prompting comparisons with the work of W. H. Auden.

In early 1961, Porter married Jannice Henry, a nurse; they had two children, Katherine (b. 1962) and Jane (b. 1964). His second collection, *Poems Ancient and Modern*, was published in 1964. This showed a development in his work away from the more impressionistic, satirically-tinged view of London life of his first collection, and towards a more wide-ranging expression of Porter's deep interest in European history and religion. Through the 1960s, Porter began to find work as a literary journalist and reviewer for the English press, writing for leading journals and newspapers such as *New Statesman*, *The Guardian*, and *Times Literary Supplement*. He continued to write poetry prolifically, and published his third collection, *A Porter Folio*, in 1969, and his fourth, *The Last of England*, in 1970. The latter collection, which explored the poet's ambivalent feelings about his adopted homeland, was his first with Oxford University Press, beginning a long association with that prestigious publishing house. In 1972, he published two collections with OUP—*Preaching to the Converted*, in which Porter's philosophical explorations came to the fore, and *After Martial*, a volume of translations from the Latin of classical Roman poet Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis). At this time he also began collaborating with Australian artist Arthur Boyd, producing two illustrated poetry books: *Jonah* (1973) and *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975); two further collaborations with Boyd appeared in the following

decade, *Narcissus* (1984), and *Mars* (1988).

The year 1974 was an eventful one for Porter. On a visit to Australia for the Adelaide Festival, he commenced an affair with a married woman. The emotional fall-out from his affair was compounded in December 1974, when his wife Jannice, who had suffered from alcoholism and depression, died in an apparent suicide. Overcome with shock, anxiety and remorse, Porter channelled his feelings into his poetry, producing some of his strongest work in the subsequent collections *Living in a Calm Country* (1975), and the acclaimed *The Cost of Seriousness* (1978). Determined not to abandon his children in the way he had been after the death of his mother, Porter brought up his two daughters in their large flat in Paddington. His work as a literary critic and essayist continued, and soon included roles in BBC radio and television broadcasting. From the late 1970s, Porter increasingly came to engage with Australian topics in his work, notably pursuing an intellectual and poetic debate with Les Murray over the defining characteristics of Australian literature and culture.

In 1983, the first volume of Porter's *Collected Poems* appeared. A milestone that focused further critical attention on his significance as a poet, this work was awarded the Grace Leven Poetry Prize and the Duff Cooper Prize, a British literary prize seldom awarded for poetry. Porter showed no signs of resting on his laurels, however, and through the 1980s produced four new collections for Oxford University Press: *English Subtitles* (1981), *Fast Forward* (1984), *The Automatic Oracle* (1987), and *Possible Worlds* (1989), and also published a volume of selected poems *A Porter Selected* (1989). The new forms of communication and emerging technologies of the late twentieth century became an increasingly important thematic concern in his work, though his poetic explorations of these changing facets of life were generally pursued with his signature irony and humour. His new work attracted further critical acclaim: *The Automatic Oracle* was awarded the Whitbread Poetry Prize while *Possible Worlds* was joint-winner of the Australian Literary Society Gold Medal. In 1987, Porter took up a position as writer-in-residence at the University of Western Australia, which led to a further exploration of Australian themes in his poetry.

In 1991, Porter married Christine Berg, who had been his partner since the early 1980s, and who, like Porter, had two daughters from a previous marriage. Through the 1990s, he continued to produce strong new work, publishing three new collections—*The Chair of Babel* (1992), *Millennial Fables* (1994), and *Dragons in their Pleasant Palaces* (1997)—as well as a second volume of *Collected Poems* (1999), which appeared after Porter's seventieth birthday. Always a remarkably prolific poet, Porter continued to write into his seventies, and continued to garner critical acclaim for his work. His 2001 collection *Max is Missing* won the prestigious Forward Poetry Prize for best collection, while *Better than God* (2009) won the Age's Dinny O'Hearn Poetry Prize. His literary achievements were also recognised with the award of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Queensland (2001), the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (2002), a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2004, and a Companion of the Royal Society of Literature in 2007. From 2000–2005, Porter and another prominent expatriate poet, Clive James, recorded a wide-ranging series of dialogues for ABC Radio National, reflecting on many aspects of their poetry, literary careers, and twentieth-century cultural life in general.

Peter Porter was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2009 and died in London on 23 April 2010, just before the publication of his final collection, *The Rest on the Flight: Selected Poems*. Regarded since the 1970s as one of the major poets writing

in English, recognition in Australia came more slowly than in his adopted home, but his important contribution to Australian literature eventually received due acknowledgement. He remained modest and unassuming about his literary achievements, however, and was often surprised by the extent of his international reputation. An erudite poet with a vast knowledge of European cultural history, Porter's work could range from complex philosophical explorations to deeply moving personal subjects, while his generous irony and humour is usually tinged with seriousness.

A Consumer's Report

The name of the product I tested is *Life*,
I have completed the form you sent me
and understand that my answers are confidential.

I had it as a gift,
I didn't feel much while using it,
in fact I think I'd have liked to be more excited.
It seemed gentle on the hands
but left an embarrassing deposit behind.
It was not economical
and I have used much more than I thought
(I suppose I have about half left
but it's difficult to tell)—
although the instructions are fairly large
there are so many of them
I don't know which to follow, especially
as they seem to contradict each other.
I'm not sure such a thing
should be put in the way of children—
It's difficult to think of a purpose
for it. One of my friends says
it's just to keep its maker in a job.
Also the price is much too high.
Things are piling up so fast,
after all, the world got by
for a thousand million years
without this, do we need it now?
(Incidentally, please ask your man
to stop calling me 'the respondent',
I don't like the sound of it.)
There seems to be a lot of different labels,
sizes and colours should be uniform,
the shape is awkward, it's waterproof
but not heat resistant, it doesn't keep
yet it's very difficult to get rid of:
whenever they make it cheaper they seem
to put less in—if you say you don't
want it, then it's delivered anyway.
I'd agree it's a popular product,
it's got into the language; people
even say they're on the side of it.
Personally I think it's overdone,
a small thing people are ready
to behave badly about. I think
we should take it for granted. If its
experts are called philosophers or market
researchers or historians, we shouldn't

care. We are the consumers and the last
law makers. So finally, I'd buy it.
But the question of a 'best buy'
I'd like to leave until I get
the competitive product you said you'd send.

Two Merits of Sunshine

'When you were about seven you were playing
Among the fallen fleshy palmnuts
On the pink cement path running through buffalo grass.
It was four o'clock in the afternoon,
Your mother had been shopping—you saw her come past
The paling fence and click the stiff clickety latch.
She was powdered in a talc of sweat
And smiled a brown and gold mouthful
Of smile, a donation of her stones
Of sunburned fat. She gave you a wind-up toy,
Pillar-box red with a registration number,
And you broke the spring by overwinding it
A minute afterwards. That was what the friends
And neighbours meant: you had broken your mother's heart.
In the kitchen, among the blue-ringed jugs,
Your mother was under a spinnaker of laughter
And all the time she was bellying out to death.
Having defined love you never needed it again,
Or its fat victim in a flowered dress,
Or a garden to tease perfection in.'

'I don't remember anything about it.
I recall only fireworks, basket bombs,
Burning letter boxes, jumping jacks,
The long-bonnetted cars of relations,
The two green snakes dangling by their tails
From a branch of the umbrella tree
And always the great antiphlogestine sun
Packing my chest with smells, the grass fires
Burning in my eye, the sulky afternoon
Drifting slowly down the cloudless sky.
As for love, I smell sex drying,
A fish box on a quay, a tin of mullet gut,
The gleam of slime that comes upon
The silver sleep of her adjacency.
I now read fashion magazines and
Deplore Mother's Day. There are no
Lovable fat women in Heaven, nothing crooked
Is made straight and no rough places plain.'

The Imperfection of the World

It was after the idea of perfection
the idea of reconciliation came—
nothing could mollify the one
and a sense of homecoming
justified the other.

Yet I foresee a new quadrangle,
ivy covering glazed brick,
and a man standing on a grille
while his colleagues decide
whether to stone him.

Or, to look less far, someone
in an apron discovering that love
is not what she wanted from life
but the name of the discontent
she feels in herself.

That the dreams which the gods bring
in their plural jackets are to show us
our ends cannot be disputed,
nor is the shape we make bearable
entering silence.

Yet we are haunted by our memory
of perfection, of setting out among ferns
for our father, the birds of the air
moderating painful noon
with their clamant cries.

Not even regret may stay in Eden.
Bellini's melodies are spoiled
by scratches on a record's surface
and a baby wakes to light fleeing
the face of nothing.

‘A bee is a device invented by a gene
to make more genes like itself.’
Therefore in the night when I cry
that I have been deserted, I am
once more made perfect.

Phar Lap in the Melbourne Museum

A masterpiece of the taxidermist's art,
Australia's top patrician stares
Gravely ahead at crowded emptiness,
As if alive, the lustre of dead hairs,
Lozenged liquid eyes, black nostrils
Gently flared, otter-satin coat declares
That death cannot visit in this thin perfection.

The democratic hero full of guile,
Noble, handsome, gentle Houyhnhnm
(In both Paddock and St. Leger difference is
Lost in the welter of money)—to see him win
Men sold farms, rode miles in floods,
Stole money, locked up wives, somehow got in:
First away, he led the field and easily won.

It was his simple excellence to be best.
Tough men owned him, their minds beset
By stakes, bookies' doubles, crooked jocks.
He soon became a byword, public asset,
A horse with a nation's soul upon his back—
Australia's Ark of the Covenant, set
Before the people, perfect, loved like God.

And like God to be betrayed by friends.
Sent to America, he died of poisoned food.
In Australia children cried to hear the news
(This Prince of Orange knew no bad or good).
It was, as people knew, a plot of life:
To live in strength, to excel and die too soon,
So they drained his body and they stuffed his skin.

Twenty years later on Sunday afternoons
You still can't see him for the rubbing crowds.
He shares with Bradman and Ned Kelly some
Of the dirty jokes you still can't say out loud.
It is Australian innocence to love
The naturally excessive and be proud
Of a thoroughbred bay gelding who ran fast.

Occam's Razor

Never take the more unlikely explanation
of any event in preference to the likely—
just so, I say to myself, as I consider
my life and conclude that this long haul
to a sort of maturity is nothing more
than a persistence of arriving in someone
with nowhere to go, rather than, as I once thought,
an inveterate but soon to be vindicated
earnest restlessness at the port of life,
a magic resistance to time, enough to
keep me the youngest person in the room
as well as the most ironically serious.

But then reflect that if one is to tease
out feelings from razors, one might prefer
to think of Ibsen's madman sharpening himself
or, in grateful suddenness, Haydn offering
his English visitor that marvellous quartet
in F Minor—what the gods mean by words
goes the long way round or takes on flesh
in dreams for the far vistas of nicknames.

Essay on Clouds

A complacent Gulliver, I lie
in silent dripping Norfolk
watching these flying islands
with selfish unconcern—
here are planetary worlds
of silvered science
but I care only that they
block the sun from signing my dull skin.

So far down, this temperate garden
and such reefs above!
Oceans floating over us
and still we breathe the neophyte
scent of disengaging pollen.
The rug, my books, the cruising cat
are drowned with me,
we do not even seem to sleep
in our afternoon pavilion.

The clouds address me:
'you will never see us after this,
though our obliging cousins
will bring continuity,
but we have marked you, flying over,
the last one of the dynasty of self.'
I can calmly wait
for such archaeologists to find me.

Why is the sea in the air?
It's only books which say it is the sea,
the clouds abhor redundancy.
Now a black stripe and then
a pall of grey bring in
tormenting voices.

They are the sensitive ones
whose ears can hear the million cries
of animals in abattoirs.
The garden is sticky with their blood.

The sun comes out
to purge exaggeration.
The sun enjoys short sentences
but clouds prefer
a shifting Jamesian syntax.

Tea is brought out on the terrace.

Once more the clouds reproach me:
'because you are so incomplete
you cannot think of us without
dragging in yourself. You are fit
for nothing better than for prophecy.'

I watch one cloud come visiting.
In half an hour it disappears
to keep an appointment in the Wash.
I wave goodbye knowing I shall miss it
less than the passing cyclist on the road.

Night awaits the upper wind.
I decide I should not like to live
in a universe kept up by love
yet unequipped to tell a joke
or contemplate the sources of its fear.

Essay on Dreams

To set the impossible as homework!
The only thing more boring than
someone else's dream is being told
the plots of films. So, to be arbitrary,
dreams are like Italian landscapes.

The known and felt and the surprising
brought together on a patterned plain
approached through car lots and untidy vines,
the Val di Chiana with a fattoria in sight
and irrigation jets spasmic in the grain.
You could be a caterpillar on a stalk
or Totila down on one knee
among the frescoes. A country you know is yours
but totally indifferent to you
where you cannot speak the language
and frogs leap into your hands,
sand underfoot like saintliness,
the modern and the ruined perfectly combined
until you're purged of every scent of home,
a true adventurer with the aegis,
warts appearing on your flying hands.

Gods cannot hide themselves. You see the spear
and brow of white Athena and you say,
What is the meaning of this masquerade,
you are not my mother. But others hide.
Training for death is what we do:
such ponderous mixtures, classic shrubbery
and a red poinsettia climbing to a door
of whitewashed lattice, heavyweight hubris
in two hemispheres...but try to make report
to any ghostly father and the dream will laugh
and settle in the curtains like a scream.

Look to the island where the herd of goats
is from a shipwreck and every dangerous
bird is widowed: seek to explain to the whole
houseparty that you'll reveal the murderer
tonight at cocktail time; find the faces
you were sure of sweaty now and snarling
as some tourists burst into the kitchen
accusing you of being Anti-American.

Arbitrary is arbitration
as the light inside the mind reveals
each dusty truth on its collapse,

and dreams are no one's coded messages,
merely the second life our flesh is fed.

Daylight drags itself through windows.
They are coming round collecting papers,
you must hand yours in. You have covered it
with nonsense, or left it white with fear.
The great poems you could write
are all assigned to Dickinson and Donne.
Peculiar to hear 'a person so obtuse
he could not even dream us a straight line'.

Round the promontory, bursting like a cake,
the ferry comes and soon its wave runs up
the slimy ramp. Perhaps this is the spot
where everything began; it could be we
can leave the toys out on the lawn and start
for home. Why not repeat yourself, the noisy
insects in the trees assert—all good is
habit that invades the homeless mind.
And dreams have never heard of history
or style, but like our childhood games
they knock us into love with present fear.

BRUCE DAWE

b. 1930

Donald Bruce Dawe AO is an Australian poet, and is considered by many as one of the most influential Australian poets of all time.

Early Life

Bruce Dawe was born in Fitzroy, Melbourne in 1930. Bruce Dawe's mother and father were from farming backgrounds in Victoria and, like his own sisters and brother, never had the opportunity to complete primary school. He always had encouragement from them (the younger of his two sisters also wrote poetry) and his mother, proud of her Lowlands Scots ancestry, would often recite poems she had learned in her 19th century childhood. Dawe's father's ancestors came from Wyke Regis in Dorset, England, in the mid-19th century. Dawe attended six schools before leaving Northcote High School at 16 without completing his Leaving Certificate. Of the four children in the family, he was the only one to attend secondary school.

Dawe was educated at Northcote High School, Melbourne. After leaving school at 16, he worked in various occupations (labourer, farmhand, clerk, sawmill-hand, gardener and postman) before joining the RAAF in 1959. He left the RAAF in 1968 and began a teaching career at Downlands College, Toowoomba in 1969. He holds four university degrees (BA, MLitt, MA and PhD) - all completed by part-time study.

He was appointed as Lecturer at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (DDIAE) in 1971, became a Senior Lecturer in 1980 and an Associate Professor following the status change to the University of Southern Queensland. He was awarded the inaugural DDIAE Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1988. He retired from full-time teaching in 1993 and was appointed as the first Honorary Professor of USQ in recognition of his contribution to the University. He has taught U3A classes ever since his retirement from full-time teaching.

Until he went to University on a teaching scholarship in 1954, he worked in a wide range of jobs: as a clerk in various firms, as well as a sales assistant, an office-boy in an advertising agency, and a copy-boy at Melbourne newspapers Truth and the Sun. He also worked as a labourer in the Public Works Department, as a tailer-out in various Melbourne saw-mills, and as a farm-hand in the Cam River valley.

Dawe gained university entrance by completing his Adult Matriculation by part-time study in 1953 and enrolled at Melbourne University. He left university at the end of 1954 and moved to Sydney where he worked as a labourer in a glass factory and later in a factory manufacturing batteries. Returning to Melbourne in 1956, he worked as a postman for two years and as a self-employed gardener.

Dawe joined the RAAF in 1959 as a trainee telegraphist, but re-mustered as an education assistant. He was posted to Malaysia and returned to Melbourne after six months.

Teaching

Leaving the RAAF in 1968, Dawe began teaching at Downlands College, a Catholic boys college—Dawe became Catholic in 1954—in Toowoomba, Queensland. After teaching English and History at secondary level for two and a

half years, he became a tertiary lecturer in English Literature at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education in Toowoomba. He taught there from 1971, retiring in 1993 as an Associate Professor at what had become the University of Southern Queensland.

Personal Life

Dawe married Gloria Desley Blain on 27 January 1964. Between Dec 1964 and Jul 1969, Bruce and Gloria had four children: Brian, twins Jamie and Katrina, and Melissa. Gloria died on 30 Dec 1997 after a long battle with cancer.

Dawe has four degrees, all completed by part-time study: B.A. (Qld.), M.Litt. (U.N.E.), M.A. (Qld.), and Ph.D. (Qld.). He now teaches various literature courses in the U3A A (University of the Third Age, an organisation for senior citizens).

Homo Suburbensis

One constant in a world of variables

- A man alone in the evening in his patch of vegetables,
and all the things he takes down with him there

Where the easement runs along the back fence and the air
smells of tomato-vines, and the hoarse rasping tendrils
of pumpkin flourish clumsy whips and their foliage sprawls

Over the compost-box, poising rampant upon
the palings ...

He stands there, lost in a green
confusion, smelling the smoke of somebody's rubbish

Burning, hearing vaguely the clatter of a disk
in a sink that could be his, hearing a dog, a kid,
a far whisper of traffic, and offering up instead

Not much but as much as any man can offer

- time, pain, love, hate, age, ware, death, laughter, fever.

Enter Without So Much as Knocking

Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.

Blink, blink. HOSPITAL. SILENCE.

Ten days old, carried in the front door in his mother's arms, first thing he heard was Bobby Dazzler on Channel 7:

Hello, hello hello all you lucky people and he really was lucky because it didn't mean a thing to him then...

A year or two to settle in and get acquainted with the set-up; like every other well-equipped smoothly-run household, his included one economy-size Mum, one Anthony Squires-Coolstream-Summerweight Dad, along with two other kids straight off the Junior Department rack.

When Mom won the Luck's-A-Fortch Tricky-Tune Quiz she took him shopping in the good-as-new station-wagon (£ 495 dep. at Reno's). Beep, beep. WALK. DON'T WALK. TURN LEFT. NO PARKING. WAIT HERE. NO SMOKING. KEEP CLEAR/OUT/OFF GRASS. NO BREATHING EXCEPT BY ORDER. BEWARE OF THIS. WATCH OUT FOR THAT. My God (beep) the congestion here just gets (beep) worse every day, now what the (beep beep) does that idiot think he's doing (beep beep and BEEP).

However, what he enjoyed most of all was when they went to the late show at the local drive-in, on a clear night and he could see (beyond the fifty-foot screen where giant faces forever snarled screamed or make incomprehensible and monstrous love) a pure unadulterated fringe of sky, littered with stars no-one had got around to fixing up yet: he'd watch them circling about in luminous groups like kids at the circus who never go quite close enough to the elephant to get kicked.

Anyway, pretty soon he was old enough to be realistic like every other godless money-hungry back-stabbing miserable so-and-so, and then it was goodbye stars and the soft cry in the corner when no-one was looking because I'm telling you straight, Jim, it's Number One every time for this chicken, hit wherever you see a head and kick whoever's down, well thanks for a lovely evening Clare, it's good to get away from it all

once in a while, I mean it's a real battle all the way
and a man can't help but feel a little soiled, himself,
at times, you know what I mean?

Now take it easy
on those curves, Alice, for God's sake,
I've had enough for one night, with that Clare Jessup,
hey, ease up, will you, watch it -

Probity & Sons, Morticians,
did a really first-class job on his face
(everyone was very pleased) even adding a
healthy tan he'd never had, living, gave him back for keeps
the old automatic smile with nothing behind it,
winding the whole show up with a
nice ride out to the underground metropolis
permanent residentials, no parking tickets, no taximeters
ticking, no Bobby Dazzlers here, no down payments,
nobody grieving over halitosis
flat feet shrinking gums falling hair.

Six feet down nobody interested.

Blink, blink. CEMETERY. Silence.

"Enter Without So Much as Knocking" is a poem written by Bruce Dawe. It can be found in the compilation, Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954 - 1992. The poem has been set as a high school text in Victoria.

Analysis **Television**

"Enter Without So Much as Knocking" was written in 1959 and displays an Australia during the advent of television. The post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s was a time of affluence when society and social values were changing. The poem follows one child in a typical nuclear family from birth through a rushed life, where he has little time for reflection, to his early death in an accident.

The poem opens with the birth of the main character and the first sound he hears is the television. It is as if he is born when the television is turned on. When he dies his death is like a television being turned off, leaving silence.

Consumerism

The father, mother and siblings in the poem are described using labels common in advertising. The mother is described as "economy-size(d)", this can be translated as "large". The term is usually used for soap powder or grocery purchases to imply quantity. The father is described as an "Anthony Squires-Coolstream-Summerweight Dad" and the siblings as being "straight off the Junior Department rack". Both these descriptions refer to clothing styles and the terms could be used in glossy magazines to describe new clothes. The people inside the clothing are not described, they are without character. Watching television, game shows, drive-in cinemas, and shopping are the activities of the people in this poem. The impression

is of everything being new and shiny, modern, full of activity and crowded, until death. It's only the stars behind the drive-in movie screen that have not been tidied up yet, that are not part of the circus.

Social Behaviours

The changing purchasing patterns and emerging consumerism of the time is very evident in the poem, as is the changing moral behaviours and attitudes. The animal-like behaviours of the actors in the movies, where they "snarled screamed" or made "monstrous love", and the aggressive, competitive behaviour, where to "hit wherever you see a head and kick whoever's down", are seen to be acceptable and normal by the characters in the poem.

In death the main character in the poem is given the illusion of happiness. The morticians gives him back the smile he lost in life and in addition gives him a "healthy tan". Also in death he had no worries about money and no fears about disintegrating, or of having bad breath or his hair falling out, but the "show is over" comparing life to a television show, and he has no materialistic concerns in the grave.

Life Cycle

(for Big Jim Phelan)

When children are born in Victoria
they are wrapped in club-colours, laid in beribboned cots,
having already begun a lifetime's barracking.

Carn, they cry, Carn ... feebly at first
while parents playfully tussle with them
for possession of a rusk: Ah, he's a little Tiger! (And they are ...)

Hoisted shoulder-high at their first League game
they are like innocent monsters who have been years swimming
towards the daylight's roaring empyrean

Until, now, hearts shrapnelled with rapture,
they break surface and are forever lost,
their minds rippling out like streamers

In the pure flood of sound, they are scarfed with light, a voice
like the voice of God booms from the stands
Ooohh you bludger and the covenant is sealed.

Hot pies and potato-crisps they will eat,
they will forswear the Demons, cling to the Saints
and behold their team going up the ladder into Heaven,

And the tides of life will be the tides of the home-team's fortunes
- the reckless proposal after the one-point win,
the wedding and honeymoon after the grand final ...

They will not grow old as those from the more northern states grow old,
for them it will always be three-quarter time
with the scores level and the wind advantage in the final term,

That passion persisting, like a race-memory, through the welter of seasons,
enabling old-timers by boundary fences to dream of resurgent lions
and centaur-figures from the past to replenish continually the present,

So that mythology may be perpetually renewed
and Chicken Smallhorn return like the maize-god
in a thousand shapes, the dancers changing

But the dance forever the same – the elderly still
loyally crying Carn ... Carn ... (if feebly) unto the very end,
having seen in the six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk their hope of salvation

Homecoming

All day, day after day, they're bringing them home,
they're picking them up, those they can find, and bringing them home,
they're bringing them in, piled on the hulls of Grants, in trucks, in convoys,
they're zipping them up in green plastic bags,
they're tagging them now in Saigon, in the mortuary coolness
they're giving them names, they're rolling them out of
the deep-freeze lockers — on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut
the noble jets are whining like hounds,
they are bringing them home
– curly heads, kinky-hairs, crew-cuts, balding non-coms
– they're high, now, high and higher, over the land, the steaming chow mein,
their shadows are tracing the blue curve of the Pacific
with sorrowful quick fingers, heading south, heading east,
home, home, home — and the coasts swing upward, the old ridiculous
curvatures
of earth, the knuckled hills, the mangrove-swamps, the desert emptiness...
in their sterile housing they tilt towards these like skiers
– taxiing in, on the long runways, the howl of their homecoming rises
surrounding them like their last moments (the mash, the splendour)
then fading at length as they move
on to small towns where dogs in the frozen sunset
raise muzzles in mute salute,
and on to cities in whose wide web of suburbs
telegrams tremble like leaves from a wintering tree
and the spider grief swings in his bitter geometry
– they're bringing them home, now, too late, too early.

"Homecoming" is a 1968 poem by Bruce Dawe. Written as an elegy for anonymous soldiers, "Homecoming" is an anti-war poem protesting Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War during the 1960s. Dennis Haskell, Winthrop Professor of English and Cultural Studies at University of Western Australia, has called it "the most highly regarded poem about Vietnam written by any Australian", and Peter Pierce, the editor of The Cambridge History of Australian Literature has described it as "one of the finest threnodies in the war literature of Vietnam".

The anti-war sentiment in "Homecoming" is more direct than in Dawe's other well-known war poem, "Weapons Training", written two years later. The ironic use of the word homecoming, with its usual connotations of celebration, as the title becomes apparent on reading the poem, in which the acts of collecting and processing the bodies of the war dead and shipping them home are described in a highly repetitive fashion, with a rhythm that evokes the beat of a funeral drum. Although the poem was written in 1968, the year Dawe left the Royal Australian Air Force, it had its origins, according to Dawe's biographer Peter Kuch, in Dawe's earlier "political awakening in Melbourne in the mid-1950s" and in particular his personal reaction to the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Before joining the RAAF, Dawe had worked as a postman. John Kinsella has proposed that Dawe's

experiences during that time are echoed in the final lines of "Homecoming":

telegrams tremble like leaves from a wintery tree
and the spider grief swings in his bitter geometry
—they're bringing them home, now, too late, too early

Weapons Training

And when I say eyes right I want to hear
those eyeballs click and the gentle pitter-patter
of falling dandruff you there what's the matter
why are you looking at me are you a queer?
look to your front if you had one more brain
it'd be lonely what are you laughing at
you in the back row with the unsightly fat
between your elephant ears open that drain
you call a mind and listen remember first
the cockpit drill when you go down be sure
the old crown-jewels are safely tucked away what could be more
distressing than to hold off with a burst
from your trusty weapon a mob of the little yellows
only to find back home because of your position
your chances of turning the key in the ignition
considerably reduced? alright now suppose
for the sake of argument you've got
a number-one blockage and a brand-new pack
of Charlies are coming at you you can smell their rotten
fish-sauce breath hot on the back
of your stupid neck alright now what
are you going to do about it? that's right grab and check
the magazine man it's not a woman's tit
worse luck or you'd be set too late you nit
they're on you and your tripe's are round your neck
you've copped the bloody lot just like I said
and you know what you are? You're dead, dead, dead.

"Weapons Training" is a piece of war poetry written by Bruce Dawe in 1970. A dramatic monologue spoken by a battle-hardened drill sergeant training recruits about to be sent off to the Vietnam War, its anti-war sentiment is evident but more oblique than in Dawe's other well-known war poem, "Homecoming", written two years earlier.

Dawe had direct experience of military life, having served in the Royal Australian Airforce from 1959 to 1968. Dennis Haskell, Winthrop Professor of English and Cultural Studies at University of Western Australia, has pointed that the drill sergeant's harsh tirade to the recruits with insults both sexual (e.g. "why are you looking at me are you a queer?") and racist (e.g. "a brand-new pack of Charlies are coming at you, you can smell their rotten fish-sauce breath") makes him seem like an exaggerated cartoon-like figure. However, he goes on to say that Dawe maintained he had not completely invented them: "Many [of them] were addressed to me or other members of the squad of RAAF recruits I was part of in 1959."

Haskell notes that "Weapons Training" had not started out as solely a dramatic monologue, and its original title was "Portrait of a Drill Instructor". The early

version contained an introductory verse with a soldier's memory of him which specifically identified the instructor as British:

I can still see his face
thrust forward out of love
for the little sunburned rookies
hunched in their chairs
or sweating at attention
see, too,
his true-blue British eyes [...]

The introductory verse was omitted from the final version making the poem less of a personal portrait and more of a general depiction of the military culture which the sergeant personified with his macho dehumanising language. In their 2009 analysis of the poem from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, David Butt and Annabelle Lukin have proposed that while the drill instructor is ostensibly teaching physical skills to the recruits, the structure of his language "foregrounds the regulation of mental experience as central to the training", training that fosters the unquestioning obedience to authority that may be crucial to their survival in combat. The poem ends with the instructor's warning to the recruits who do not follow his advice:

and you know what you are? You're dead, dead, dead

*"Weapons Training" is included in the 1971 collection of Dawe's poetry *Condolences of the Season* and in his *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems, 1954–1992*. It is also published in several anthologies of Australian literature, including *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1988) and *Clubbing of the Gunfire: 101 Australian War Poems* (Melbourne University Press, 1984), and frequently appears on the English syllabus of Australian schools.*

Stuff Happens

(for Ray)

Like those they call collateral damage, I was helped to leave the system and retire. Of course I wasn't killed. I didn't die. I was just taken out by friendly fire.
—Ray Kelley, 'Quietus'

Your great ballade with its infinitely
memorable refrain has answered, at least for me,
a most troubling question of theology

and one about which always much
debate has centred: is God losing touch
or is the complexity of the cosmic battle-field now such

that these things simply happen, even in a world
where the flag of God's omnipotence is unfurled
somewhere every morning, whether dewy-pearled

or otherwise, so that unintended consequences flow
from what, as far as human HQ know,
is just a simple routine sentry-go?

And while human agency should take the blame
for much that happens in His holy name,
there is, in the fate of many, just the same

no better explanation for the dire
fate that infantry suffer on the wire,
or while sleeping fitfully in some foxhole, that if higher

responsibility is to be attributed then the cause
(as happens in the very best of wars)
comes after the heading of 'Immutable Laws',

so that for homo sapiens, as for all
of God's embattled creatures, answering the call
of their multifoliate natures, where we fall

is simply the collateral damage of our lot
(except in this world, whether we like it or not,
the end result is: everyone gets shot).

2011

FAY ZWICKY

b. 1933

The daughter of a doctor and a musician, Australian poet, essayist, and short story writer Fay Zwicky was born in Melbourne as Julia Fay Rosefield. She earned a BA at the University of Melbourne and trained as a classical pianist, performing with her sisters as the Rosefield Trio for a decade before turning her focus to writing.

Zwicky's poems explore gender, the Jewish faith, and the use and misuse of political power. In an interview with the *Age* newspaper, Zwicky addressed the political focus of her later poetry: "My poems are getting a bit engrossed by the political state of things at the moment ... leaning towards a study of despotism, the waste of life and the need for survival." She is the author of numerous books of poetry, including *Picnic* (2006), *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1982), and *Isaac Babel's Fiddle* (1975), as well as *The Lyre in the Pawnshop: Essays on Literature and Survival 1974–1984* (1986) and the short story collection *Hostages* (1983).

Zwicky has won the Western Australia Premier's Book Award three times, as well as the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, the Patrick White Award, and the Christopher Brennan Award. She taught at the University of Western Australia from 1972 until her retirement in 1987. Zwicky was declared a State Living Treasure in 2004.

Letting Go

Tell the truth of experience
they say they also
say you must let
go learn to let go
let your children
go

and they go
and you stay
letting them go
because you are obedient and
respect everyone's freedom
to go and you stay

and you want to tell the truth
because you are yours truly
its obedient servant
but you can't because
you're feeling what you're not
supposed to feel you have
let them go and go and

you can't say what you feel
because they might read
this poem and feel guilty
and some post-modern hack
will back them up
and make you feel guilty
and stop feeling which is
post-modern and what
you're meant to feel

so you don't write a poem
you line up words in prose
inside a journal trapped
like a scorpion in a locked
drawer to be opened by
your children let go
after lived life and all the time
a great wave bursting
howls and rears and

you have to let go
or you're gone you're
gone gasping you
let go
till the next wave

towers crumbles
shreds you to lace—

When you wake
your spine is twisted
like a sea-bird
inspecting the sky,
stripped by lightning.

The Age of Aquarius

She slumps in the disabled bay
clutching a waffle-cotton gown
around a spreading paunch,
shambling breasts.

Why not say 'I'?
For that's who sits at 6 a.m.
waiting for the health club
pool to open in the rain.
A grown woman, after all,
supposed to know her whereabouts.

Today's my mother's birthday,
a 1907 Aquarian of the self-
denying kind, 'never say "I"' her motto.
She had me nailed for years. Her voice
drowns out the radio's chattering static.
Now I'm the same age she was, dying,
observing noble savagery:

a gathering knot of skinny women,
tight black butts in leotards,
regulation sneakers, Brazil-waxed calves,
gripping i-pods, mobiles, water bottles.
The men stand back, silent, sullen,
balding, bored and out of it. Health stalkers,
renouncers of smoke and flame,
deniers of brimstone.
One hell of a century:
between the holocaust and the atom bomb
who are these people?

Between the deep and shallow end,
never say thank you or good morning.
Avoid eye contact.
Signals may be misinterpreted.
Slow Lane, Fast Lane, Walking Lane
Only's where I'm at.
The moving parts count laps:
twenty five's a half-hour's worth.
I sing myself a rumba to keep rhythm;
the Speedo wall clock ticks a strict 4/4
defeats my ruse while dove's feet skitter
arrow-wise across the perspex roof.
No Diving Running Eating Smiling
Share if lanes are busy.
Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.

The waiting crowd are all, like me,
up early talking or silent,
more vivacious than galahs,
more foolish than parrots.

We stand and wait, walk up and down
in the rain talking or not, holding
in sagging muscle, spreading paunch,
talking about things that must matter.
So much seems to hang on
getting in that door.

Soup and Jelly

“Feed Fred and sit with him
and mind he doesn’t walk about.
He falls. Tell him his ute is safe
back home. Thinks someone’s pinched it,
peers around the carpark all the time.
His family brought him in it and
he thinks it’s gone.
He was a farmer once . . .”

I take the tray. The ice-cream’s almost
melted round the crumbled orange jelly
and the soup’s too hot. I know
I’ll have to blow on it.

Hunched, trapped behind a tray,
he glances sideways, face as brown
and caverned as the land itself,
long thin lips droop ironic
at the corners, gaunt nose.
The blue and white pajamas cage
the restless rangy legs.
In and out they go, the feet
in cotton socks feeling for the ground.

“Are you a foreigner?”
“Not exactly. Just a little sunburnt,”
and I put the jelly down. I musn’t feel
a thing: my smile has come unstuck.
I place a paper napkin on his lap. He winces.
“You’re a foreigner all right,” he says.
“OK,” I say. What’s one displacement more or less,
wishing I were a hearty flat-faced Fenian
with a perm and nothing doing in the belfry.
Someone like his mother. Or a wife who
spared him the sorrow of himself.
Now he grabs the spoon. “I’ll do it.”
“Right,” I say, “You go ahead. Just ask me
if you want some help.” The tone’s not right.
I watch the trembling progress of the spoon
for what seems years, paralysed with pity
for his pride.

How does a dark-faced woman give a man called Fred
who cropped a farm and drove a battered ute
a meal of soup and jelly?

Outside the window, clouds are swelling

into growing darkness and there's a man
hard on his knees planting something in the rain.

The Poet Asks Forgiveness

Dead to the world I have failed you
Forgive me, traveller.

Thirsty, I was no fountain
Hungry, I was not bread
Tired, I was no pillow

Forgive my unwritten poems:
the many I have frozen with irony
the many I have trampled with anger
the many I have rejected in self-defence
the many I have ignored in fear

unaware, blind or fearful
I ignored them.
They clamoured everywhere
those unwritten poems.
They sought me out day and night
and I turned them away.

Forgive me the colours
they might have worn
Forgive me their eclipsed faces
They dared not venture from
the unwritten lines.

Under each inert hour of my silence
died a poem, unheeded

FLEUR ADCOCK

b. 1934

Kareen Fleur Adcock (known as Fleur Adcock), CNZM, OBE (born 10 February 1934) is a New Zealand poet and editor, of English and Northern Irish ancestry, who has lived much of her life in England.

Adcock was born in Auckland, but spent the years between 1939 and 1947 in the UK. Her sister is the novelist Marilyn Duckworth. She studied Classics at the Victoria University of Wellington, graduating with a M.A.. She worked as an assistant lecturer and later an assistant librarian at the University of Otago in Dunedin until 1962. She was married to two famous New Zealand literary personalities. In 1952 she married Alistair Campbell, (divorced 1958). Then in 1962 she married Barry Crump, divorcing in 1963.

In 1963, Adcock returned to England and took up a post as an assistant librarian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London until 1979. Since then she has been a freelance writer, living in East Finchley, north London. She has held several literary fellowships, including the Northern Arts Literary Fellowship in Newcastle upon Tyne and Durham in 1979-81.

Adcock's poetry is typically concerned with themes of place, human relationships and everyday activities, but frequently with a dark twist given to the mundane events she writes about. Formerly, her early work was influenced by her training as a classicist but her more recent work is looser in structure and more concerned with the world of the unconscious mind.

Her first poetry collection, *Eye of the Reed*, was published in New Zealand in 1964, and since then she has written over ten more collections of poetry, observing the world with a quiet trenchancy. This observation is applied frequently to nature and our relationship with animals ("All our lives we're surrounded by these creatures," as she has said). It is also applied to other people and to ourselves, observed from the outside. 'Immigrant', which can be found (and heard) on the Poetry Archive website, begins in "November '63: eight months in London", with the poet looking at the pelicans. Even these non-native birds "float like swans":

*I clench cold fists in my Marks and Spencer's jacket
And secretly test my accent once again:
St James' Park; St James' Park; St James' Park.*

This deadpan everyday detail (such as the 'native' Marks and Spencers jacket, the practised speech), combined with an unflinching exposure of internal impulses, also characterises the poem 'At the Crossing', which appears here. In this poem, the poet sees a man in a green T-shirt, wearing a pair of fairy wings. There's practically no chance to even notice him, however:

*Traffic swings around the corner;
gusts of drizzle sweep us along
the Strand in the glittering dark,
threading to and fro among skeins
of never-quite-colliding blurs.
All this whirling's why we came out.*

Adcock's poems use description to ask questions: what is this thing? Who is this? Where am I? They also question her own responses to things. The sense of mystery-within-ordinariness remains long after the reader is finished reading the poem.

in 1987 Adcock edited the *Faber Book of 20th Century Women's Poetry*, and her brand of stealthy, pragmatic feminism has concentrated more on integrating poetry by women into the mainstream of literary tradition than in separating it out into a separate category called 'women's poetry'. Her poems quietly expose or unearth women's lives, reminding the reader to look beyond what is shown. Recent poems about family history, addressing ancestors or old family stories – “unpeeling lives out of archives”, as she has called it – make use of the poet's gift for the anecdote, drily told, and bring the hidden everyday world to life.

Adcock's *Poems 1960–2000* was published by Bloodaxe, who also published her most recent collection, *Dragon Talk*, in 2010. A new collection, from which the poems featured here are drawn, will be published next year.

Fleur Adcock's poetry has received many awards in both the UK and New Zealand, and she was awarded an OBE in 1996.

December Morning

I raise the blind and sit by the window
dry-mouthed, waiting for light.
One needs a modest goal
something safely attainable.
An hour before sunrise
(due at seven fifty-three)
I go out into the cold new morning
for a proper view of that performance;
walk greedily towards the heath
gulping the blanched air
and come in good time to Kenwood.
They have just opened the gates.
There is a kind of world here, too:
on the grass slopes above the lake
in the white early Sunday
I see with something like affection
people I do not know
walking their unlovable dogs.

Mornings After

The surface dreams are easily remembered:
I wake most often with a comforting sense
of having seen a pleasantly odd film –
nothing too outlandish or too intense;

of having, perhaps, befriended animals,
made love, swum the Channel, flown in the air
without wings, visited Tibet or Chile:
simple childish stuff. Or else the rare

recurrent horror makes its call upon me:
I dream one of my sons is lost or dead,
or that I am trapped in a tunnel underground;
but my scream is enough to recall me to my bed.

Sometimes, indeed, I congratulate myself
on the nice precision of my observation:
on having seen so vividly a certain
colour; having felt the sharp sensation

of cold water on my hands; the exact taste
of wine or peppermints. I take a pride
in finding all my senses operative
even in sleep. So, with nothing to hide,

I amble through my latest entertainment
again, in the bath or going to work,
idly amused at what the night has offered;
unless this is a day when a sick jerk

recalls to me in a sudden vision:
I see myself inspecting the vast slit
of a sagging whore; making love with a hunchbacked
hermaphrodite; eating worms or shit;

or rapt upon necrophily or incest.
And whatever loathsome images I see
are just as vivid as the pleasant others.
I flush and shudder: my God, was that me?

Did I invent so ludicrously revolting
a scene? And if so, how could I forger
until this instant? And why now remember?
Furthermore (and more disturbing yet)

are all my other forgotten dreams like these?
Do I, for hours of my innocent nights,

wallow content and charmed through verminous muck
rollick in the embraces of such frights?

And are the comic or harmless fantasies
I wake with merely a deceiving guard,
as one might put a Hans Andersen cover
on a volume of the writings of De Sade?

Enough, enough. Bring back those easy pictures,
Tibet or antelopes, a seemly lover,
or even the black tunnel. For the rest,
I do not care to know. Replace the cover.

At the Crossing

The tall guy in a green T-shirt,
vanishing past me as I cross
in the opposite direction,
has fairy wings on his shoulders:
toy ones, children's fancy-dress wings,
cartoonish butterfly cut-outs.

Do they say gay? No time for that.
He flickers past the traffic lights –
whoosh! gone! – outside categories.
Do they say foreign? They say young.
They say London. Grab it, they say.
Kiss the winged joy as it flies.

Traffic swings around the corner;
gusts of drizzle sweep us along
the Strand in the glittering dark,
threading to and fro among skeins
of never-quite-colliding blurs.
All this whirling's why we came out.

Those fragile flaps could lift no one.
Perhaps they were ironic wings,
tongue-in-cheek look-at-me tokens
to make it clear he had no need
of hydraulics, being himself
Hermes.
Wings, though; definite wings.

Blow Flies

If you liked them, how your heart might have lifted
to see their neat trapezium shapes studding
the wall like a newly landed flight of jet
ornaments, the intensity of their black
gloss, with secret blues and greens half-glinting through,
and the glass wings, not so unlike those of bees –

if you could bring yourself; if they occupied
a niche in creation nudged fractionally
sideways –
because it's not their present forms, it's
their larval incarnations that you can't stop
heaving into view, white nests moistly seething
in a dead pigeon or a newspaper-wrapped
package leaking beside a path (but enough –
the others will kindly absent themselves, please!)

And wondering what, where – under the floorboards
or behind the freezer – suddenly hatched these.

Immigrant

'Immigrant' looks back from some years afterwards to the time when I first arrived in London from New Zealand feeling very foreign, in fad very colonial with my New Zealand accent which I hastened to get rid of, and my Marks & Spencers clothes - I was trying to pass as a genuine Londoner like so many others. I would walk around St James's Park sometimes at lunchtime and I would see the swans who were actual English birds on the lake, and the pelicans who were immigrants like me and I tended to identify with the pelicans.

November '63: eight months in London.

I pause on the low bridge to watch the pelicans:
they float swanlike, arching their white necks
over only slightly ruffled bundles of wings,
burying awkward beaks in the lake's water.

I clench cold fists in my Marks and Spencer's jacket
and secretly test my accent once again:
St James's Park; St James's Park; St James's Park.

The Belly Dancer

Across the road the decorators have finished;
your flat has net curtains again
after all these weeks, and a 'To Let' sign.

I can only think of it as a tomb,
excavated, in the end, by
explorers in facemasks and protective spacesuits.

No papers, no bank account, no next of kin;
only a barricade against the landlord,
and the police at our doors, early, with questions.

What did we know? Not much: a Lebanese name,
a soft English voice; chats in the street
in your confiding phase; the dancing.

You sat behind me once at midnight Mass.
You were Orthodox, really; church
made you think of your mother, and cry.

From belly dancer to recluse, the years
and the stealthy ballooning of your outline,
kilo by kilo, abducted you.

Poor girl, I keep saying; poor girl –
no girl, but young enough to be my daughter.
I called at your building once, canvassing;

your face loomed in the hallway and, forgetting
whether or not we were social kissers,
I bounced my lips on it. It seemed we were not.

They've even replaced your window frames. I still
imagine a midden of flesh, and that smell
you read about in reports of earthquakes.

They say there was a heart beside your doorbell
upstairs. They say all sorts. They would –
who's to argue? I don't regret the kiss.

Composition for Words and Paint

This darkness has a quality
That poses us in shapes and textures,
One plane behind another,
Flatness in depth.

Your face; a fur of hair; a striped
Curtains behind, and to one side cushions;
Nothing recedes, all lies extended.
I sink upon your image.

I see a soft metallic glint,
A tinsel weave behind the canvas,
Aluminum and bronze beneath the ochre.
There is more in this than we know.

I can imagine drawn around you
A white line, in delicate brush-strokes:
Emphasis; but you do not need it.
You have completeness.

I am not measuring your gestures;
(I have seen you measure those of others,
Know a mind by a hand's trajectory,
The curve of a lip.)

But you move, and I move towards you,
Draw back you head, and I advance.
I am fixed to the focus of your eyes.
I share your orbit.

Now I discover things about you:
Your thin wrists, a tooth missing;
And how I melt and burn before you.
I have known you always.

The greyness from the long windows
Reduces visual depth; but tactile
Reality defines half-darkness.
My hands prove you solid.

You draw me down upon your body,
Hard arms behind my head.
Darkness and soft colours blur.
We have swallowed the light.

Now I dissolve you in my mouth,
Catch in the corners of my throat

The sly taste of your love, sliding
Into me, singing.

Just as the birds have started singing.
Let them come flying through the windows
With chains of opals around their necks.
We are expecting them.

Before Sleep

Lying close to your heart-beat, my lips
Touching the pulse in your neck, my head on your arm,
I listen to your hidden blood as it slips
With a small furry sound along the warm
Veins; and my slowly-flowering dream
Of Chinese landscapes, river-banks and flying
Splits into sudden shapes – children who scream
By a roadside, blinded men, a woman lying
In a bed filled with blood: the broken ones.
We are so vulnerable. I curl towards
That intricate machine of nerves and bones
With it's built-in life: your body. And to your words
I whisper 'Yes' and 'Always', as I lie
Waiting for thunder from a stony sky.

DAVID MALOUF

b. 1934

David Malouf was born on 20 March 1934 in a private hospital in South Brisbane, the suburb where he grew up, as memorably recounted in his memoir *12 Edmondstone Street* (1985). His paternal family had arrived in Australia in the 1880s from Lebanon, while his mother's were Sephardic Jews from Spain, who had gone to England via Holland, before migrating to Australia in 1913. He attended Brisbane Grammar School and then completed his Bachelor of Arts degree at University of Queensland.

His father's family had immigrated to Australia from the Lebanon in the 1880s and his mother's family had arrived from London before the First World War. In 1955, Malouf graduated from the University of Queensland and then taught in the Department of English there until he moved to England in 1959. He remained in England, working as a teacher at Holland Park Comprehensive School and then Birkenhead, during which time his first selection of poems appeared in Australia in the collection *Four Poets* in 1962.

When he was 24, like many young Australians during this period, he travelled overseas, remaining there for almost ten years, teaching in England and travelling in Europe. In 1968 he returned to Australia and was appointed senior tutor and, later, lecturer in English at the University of Sydney, resigning in 1977 to become a full-time writer. Initially he spent part of the year writing in the peace and quiet of southern Tuscany but since 1985 has lived in Sydney.

Malouf began writing as a child, publishing work in a neighbourhood newspaper when he was about seven years old. After reading Kenneth Slessor's poetry as a teenager, Malouf was inspired to attempt to become a poet himself. His friend Judith Rodriguez sent some of Malouf's early poems to Clem Christesen, then editor of the literary journal *Meanjin*. His first poem to be published appeared there in 1960 and in 1962 he was one of the poets represented in *Four Poets*, the others being fellow Brisbane poets Don Maynard, Judith Green (later Rodriguez), and Rodney Hall. Malouf's first solo collection, *Bicycle and other poems*, appeared in the UQP Paperback Poets series in 1970. His next collection, *Neighbours in a Thicket* (1974), confirmed Malouf's reputation as one of Australia's leading poets, winning that year's Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies Award, as well as the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal and the Grace Leven Poetry Prize.

Returning to Australia in 1968, Malouf lectured in English at the University of Sydney until 1977, during which time he published three further collections of poetry *Bicycle and other poems* (1970), *Neighbours in a Thicket: poems* (1974), *Poems 1975-76* (1976), edited a collection of Australian verse titled *Gesture of a Hand* (1975) and published his first novel *Johnno* (1975).

By then, Malouf was also turning his attention to fiction; his first novel, *Johnno*, appeared in 1975, his second, *An Imaginary Life* (1978), was an international success. Malouf has gone on to publish five further novels, which have won major Australian and international awards and been translated into many languages, as well as publishing novellas and short stories. He has also written a play, opera libretti, including an adaptation of Patrick White's novel *Voss*, and many highly regarded essays. Malouf was made an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1987 and

elected an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1989. In 1997 he was declared an Australian National Living Treasure, while he received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2000.

In 1978, he published his second novel *An Imaginary Life*, the dream-like tale of Ovid in exile, which was a critical success and has become a classic of Australian literature. In the same year he moved to Campagnatico in Tuscany, Italy, and dedicated himself to writing full-time, producing three further collections of poetry, three further novels/novellas and a collection of short stories before returning to Sydney in 1985 where he still lives today.

Since 1974, however, Malouf has also continued to write poetry, publishing collections of new works at regular intervals. Volumes of his selected poems appeared in Australia in 1981, 1991 and 1992, as well as in London in 1994. *Typewriter Music* (2007) received the 2008 Arts Queensland Judith Wright Calanthe Prize for Poetry. *Revolving Days*, made up of new and selected poems, appeared in 2008. Like his fiction, Malouf's poetry is distinguished by his use of concrete detail and arresting images, together with his preoccupation with such themes as history, memory and language.

Since returning to Sydney, he has published numerous other novels, short story collections, a work of autobiography, non-fiction and libretti. He delivered the Australian Broadcasting Commission's 1998 Boyer Lectures, examining the shaping of Australian history, consciousness and imagination, which were subsequently published under the title *A Spirit of Play* (and are available online). In 2003, he contributed an essay to Black Inc's Quarterly Essay series, entitled *Made in England*. In 1992, *David Malouf: Poems 1959-1989* was published by the University of Queensland Press leaving no doubt that Malouf remains equally one of Australia's most important novelists and poets.

Malouf has won numerous awards and accolades in Australia and internationally including the 1974 Grace Leven Prize for poetry, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature and the 2000 Lannan Literary Award (US). Closer to home he was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal in 2003 for service to Australian society and literature.

A new collection of short stories titled *Every Move You Make* will soon be published, as will a new novel, *Ransom*, based on an episode in the Trojan War. Malouf's most recent publications of poetry have featured in *Heat* and *The Best Australian Poems* 2003, and leave good hope that a new collection of his poetry might appear before long.

Poems such as 'Elegy: The Absences' and 'The Crab Feast' set forth a complex but absolutely clear and masterfully sustained music that resonates with the narratives of love, death, union, godhead and desire that underwrite so much of Western literature and thought. A part of Malouf's mastery is that his poetry's music flows seamlessly from particular place, from Australia, and casts universal concerns into a recognisable but never overstated vernacular. He captures in the interweaving of idiom and the miscellanies of history and myth, the complex layering and timbre of Australian voice as it flows into the greater delta of English. Poems such as 'Seven Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian' show clearly how close we exist to age-old truths of loss and love, and bring forth a deep sense of common, and so connected, humanity. Precision, the transformative powers of language, the joys of being in and of the body while connected to the limitless world, along with the same profound spiritual generosity and insight that illuminates his novels, coalesce in these poems, rendering the endless metamorphosis and divine music of language, body, being and earth.

Malouf's voice blends erudition and music with masterful ease and acuity, allowing the worlds of thought, the body and dream to be integrated, and to flow forth with a sensual and transformative grace. There is a tact and integrity to Malouf's work that is able to interweave the rich heritage of Western mythology with contemporary social reality, illuminating and transforming the present into a depth of presence that speaks across time, joining in the endless metamorphosis of human being.

Malouf's formidable oeuvre exhibits a virtuosity unparalleled in contemporary Australian letters, and his poetry and prose alike firmly place him at the forefront of contemporary literature internationally. As an editor is it a great pleasure to be able to offer to Poetry International Web readers a substantial selection of poetry from one of Australia's greatest writers.

In the Beginning

The table's there in the kitchen, where I kneel
on a high chair, tongue at air, trawling a slate
with pot-hooks; on the track of words; on the track of this word,
table. Is there instant, wobbly wooden,
four-square in its solid self, and does not need
my presence to underwrite its own or scrawl,
thick tongue, thick hand, a puddle slate and knock it
up out of blue nowhere. Where are they, table,
slate, slate-pencil, kitchen, and that solid
intent child on one knee reaching for sawn
planks back there? Breathless today, or almost,
I wrestle uphill to where, in a forest gap
of table size, it stands, four legged, dumb,
still waiting. An unbreathed word among the chirrup
and chafe, it taps a foreleg. *Table*, I mutter.
With tool-marks fresh as tongue-licks, already criss-crossed
with scars I feel my own where hard use makes them,
it moves as that child's hand moves about muddy water.

© 1992, David Malouf

Preludes

For Bruce and Brenda Beaver

I

Today: we have come through it
and beyond. It is almost
tomorrow. We have arrived at the near edge
of a stubble field that shelves toward bluer weather.
At the far end it is pinewood
then air. In some other quarter of the sky they say
it's foggy; there are warnings to small shipping
of gales et cetera; but here as far
as the eye can see it's full
summer, a fair beginning, and we
are making without haste across the scene; light sizzles
on our shoulder-blades, we flush up
crickets that climb my trouser-legs and leap, a minor grace,
from my shirtfront, perform
in your hair. Another couple,
and a child who was alone collecting pebbles, have gone off left
by a downward path that leads — can't you smell it?—
to surf; we do not miss them. First
the small grass and its creatures, later pines.
Then, at the end of this field
another; or a parcel of the same that after
forest and grass from this side has the look of
(in one of its many moods) a stretch of air.

II

The road climbs uphill into
the sun. It is
earth worn flat
with footsteps. Blossoms

nod above the light that has been
beaten up (such heavy
traffic!) and the bees
work along it. Forests

of a cloudlike blue begin
on either side, they roll to
horizons. It would depend
on how you see it whether

this path leads to the world
or back from it; earth
does not run to distinctions.
Sometimes I am on

the road, sometimes
my shadow is and I
am not. It makes no odds.
Bees fossick gold

where they find it, transmuting
dust into clouds
of froth-pale future forests
that dream in the boughs

of this one. Another
road must run
between. I follow it.
At home wherever I am.

III

Dawn flares along the edge of an office block: knife
like unseals an envelope
the new day delivers.

This section of the grid
works with the muddled cries, the uneasy cornering
of a bad dream's used-car salesyard and a river
sliding into dawn, the scattered debris
of the night sky still upon it. All we were given
and had, and then pretended not to hear,
fills the street with traffic, desperate
souls stamping for out through a long cool drink that might be gin,
a blue spell between showers or a blond head turning
away in wisps of windblown cloud that leaves us
trampolining high out of the smog
but leaves us just the same and who is happy
to be the same or left? The moment hovers:
too simple to be true, an ambiguity turned over
reveals the underside
of freeway happenings. Something is carried
forward beyond all this, that can't be left
on a seat at small bus-stations. A residuum
settles on all things and glows like space dust sifting
towards us; or occasions move
in the opposite direction, space eddies
out of them, they glow from
within.

IV

The world is as if
after rain. Things wear their instant
original sheen

before thumb print

or boot. Roof tiles laid
at a keen diagonal

define a perfect wedge
of air that clouds move into,
a bird flies out of; several

leaves shine. In my head
the tree goes all the way
down, out of sight

at street level touches
the earth. All is
in its fragments set right

in the frame, and washed
are the various grey
and grey-brown city colours.

As if after rain
is a corner of and posits
the whole. But here

such arguments move out
of view, like a bird between
office blocks that makes for,

we guess, some spot of green as if
Eden (or as we
set off, so we assume).

V

The day is open
on all sides. Little clouds
puff out of my head, and a few free
performances divert
the air, so easily dented since it gives
and gives more than we need
of it to feed our bodies with its blue, or
our spirit with what trickles
up, invisible, as things push through out of themselves
to the far side of the picture.

On that side
too the day is open. A shadow enters;
the rest of course must follow. So we wait, eyes covered
by the hands of one who steps out of the fog
behind us.
Let the angel
speak before you answer. The first word
that flies into your head,

but *now*, will be the last word of its text.

VI

Expected, it will appear like any other
at the proper hour, inheriting its weather
from last night's stars, a ripple
of frog spawn on the lake's
too lucent foliage, its glassy forest: a morning
quick with departures. Over the flat land the sky
moves mountains of breath. Something new
has crept into the scene, the whole lake shivers. Out of
an evergreen that branches
downward in its depths, a boy, bare-legged, clambers through
towards real grass and makes for the horizon.
I turn, watch his shadow
grow near. The pace of things
quickens, as if the day suddenly found itself translated
to a new nervous system, all its greens
tuned up a pitch, air at a cooler tension
on the surface of the skin. A head
swivels through a hundred and eighty degrees, I see myself
at a distance reappear
as *me*, as in the phrase *someone is watching*
me or beyond the morning's frame of reference
aims at me. And a hat I haven't worn since I was a kid
at high school spirals
up, out through a hole between the clouds not much bigger
than a head, taking with it
whatever was under it
once, all those adolescent yearnings
after fame or love or fast cars tearing off down numbered highways.
The landscape goes on breathing
the open air, as huffing, I jog regretfully away after
a hat or some such lost thing. Finding
my way out among clouds, I lift
a tent flap — circus music! and slip in free under the skyline.

In the Sea's Giving

A world so close that was not
ours. Though we could swim,
my sister and I,
before we could walk,

it was not our element;
the ocean that all night
breathed in our sleep
was two thirds of a planet

we'd not inherited,
and deeper than daylight
could fathom. Even in dreams
we failed to make friends

with its creatures. Cuttlefish
could not be reconciled
to their birdcage bones, seahorses
were fabulous strangers,

more fabulous because,
unlike the beasts of air
and earth, all our wishing
could not make pets

of them, like tabbycats
in butter boxes killed
with kindness, willy wagtails
tempted with rainbow cakecrumbs —

snap! These others
melted in our heads.
Hauled out into the sun
they came unstuck,

their souls, opaque as iceblocks,
stank. Sunshine it seemed
was fatal to them.
How then did we manage

to live with it? What
had we traded to be safe?
Past midnight, sealed off
in the bronze bell of the moon,

we plunged over the sea ledge seeking
answers, climbed back

at dawn wearing our magic
skin — only later

found what we had lost.
In the flush of warm salt floating
out of ourselves
the ghosts, fishlike, transparent,

that light our flesh, we stumbled
on the shores of an ice-blue earlier
kingdom; before us
sunshine and a death.

The Crab Feast

I

There is no getting closer
than this. My tongue slips into
the furthest, sweetest corner
of you. I know all

now all your secrets.
When the shell
cracked there was nothing
between us. I taste moonlight

transformed into flesh
and the gas bubbles rising
off sewage. I go down
under the mangrove roots and berries, under the moon's

ashes; it is cool
down there. I always knew that there was more
to the Bay than its glitters,
knew if you existed

I could also
enter it; I'd caught so deeply all
your habits, knowing the ways
we differ I'd come to think we must be one.

I took you
to me. Prepared
a new habitat under the coral
reef of my ribs. You hang there, broken like the sun.

II

Noon that blinding glass did not reveal us
as we were. It cast us variant selves
more real than
reflections, forms

with a life of their own,
stalk eye a periscope
that determined horizons, Doulton claws
that could snap off a thumb.

I liked that. Hence the deep afternoons
with pole and net, the deeper
nights when I went down after the tropic
sun. Hence too the Latin

names, a dangerous clawhold. I wanted the whole of you, raw
poundage
in defiance of breathlessness
or the power of verbal charms,
on my palm, on my tongue.

III

This the Place. I come back
nightly to find it
– still, sleepy, sunlit, presided over

by old-timers, waterbirds whose one
thin leg props up clouds,
the ruck of open water

ahead, and the hours
of deepening blue on blue the land wades into afternoon.
These then the perspectives:
matchwood pier, a brackish estuary
that flows on into
the sun, a rip of light over the dunes.

I enter. It is all
around me, the wash
of air, clear-spirit country. It goes on

all day like this. The tide
hovers and withdraws. Under the sun, under the moon's
cross-currents, shadows

fall into place
and are gathered to the dark. This hunt
is ritual, all the parties to it lost. Even the breaths

we draw between cries
are fixed terms in what is celebrated,
the spaces in a net.

Among mangrove trunks the fire
-flies like small hot love-crazed
planets switch on,

switch off. They too
have caught something. A chunk of solid midnight
thrashes in the star-knots of their mesh.

IV

You scared me with your stillness and I scared
myself. Knowing
that everything, even the footsoles of the dead, where your small
mouths

nudged them, would feed

the airy process of it.
The back of my head
was open to the dream
dark your body moves in. I hunted you

like a favourite colour,
indigo, to learn
how changeable we are, what rainbows
we harbour with us

and how I should die, cast wheezing into
a cauldron of fog.
That was the plan:
to push on through

the spectrum to that perfect
primary death colour, out
into silence and a landscape
of endings, with the brute sky pumping red.

V.

I watch at a distance
of centuries, in the morning
light of another planet
or the earliest gloom

of this one, your backward
submarine retreat,
as hovering across
the seabed — courtly,

elate, iron-plated —
you practice the Dance.
I watch and am shut out.
The terrible privacies!

You move slow motion sideways,
an unsteady astronaut:
step and counter
step, then the clash,

soundless, of tank engagement;
you might be angels
in the only condition
our senses reach them in. I observe

your weightless, clumsy-tender
release. I observe
the rules; cut off

here in the dimension

of pure humanity, my need for air
a limiting factor,
I look through into
your life. Its mysteries

disarm me. Turning
away a second time
to earth, to air, I leave you
to your slow-fangled order,

taking with me
more than I came for
and less. You move back into
my head. No, it does not finish here.

VI

We were horizons
of each other's consciousness. All transactions
at this distance are small
blurred, uninsistent. Drawn

by unlikeness, I grew
like you, or dreamed I did, sharing your cautious
sideways grip on things, not to be broken,
your smokiness of blood, as kin

to dragons we guarded
in the gloom of mangrove trunks
our hoard. I crossed the limits
into alien territory. One of us

will die of this, I told myself; and one of us
did. The other
swam off to lick warm stones and sulk with clouds along a
shoreline,
regretting the deep

shelves and downward spaces,
breathing easy,
but knowing something more
was owed and would take place. I go down

in the dark to that encounter, the sun
at my back. On the sea-bed
your eyes on their sticks
click white in the flattened shadow of my head.

VII

A dreamy phosphorescence

paddles towards me. The moon drowns,
feeds, its belly white, its tough shell
black. We are afloat

together. You are
my counterweight there, I hand above you
in sunlight and a balance
is struck. No, the end

will not be like this.
We belong to different orders, and are trapped
by what we chose. Our kinship
is metaphorical, but no less deadly for all that,

old Dreadnought; as if I wore
black and carried death clenched in my fist. I do
wear black. My hand is open. It is my teeth
that seek you in the dark. And I approach bearing a death.

VIII

It was always like this: you
broken before me,
beautiful in all
the order of your parts, an anatomy lesson,

the simple continent
our bodies broke away from.
Because you are so open, because
the whole of your life

is laid out here, a chamber
to be entered and stripped. You have nothing
to hide. That sort of power
kills us, for whom

moonlight, the concept blue,
is intolerably complex as
our cells are, each an open universe
expanding beyond us, the tug

of immortality.
We shall reach it and still die.
I will be
broken after you, that was the bargain

all this
a compact between us, who love
our privacies. I play
my part. Bent over you I dip my hand

in the bowl, I shake my cuffs, out in the open

and lost. Deep down
I am with you in the dark. The secret flesh of
my tongue enters a claw.

Because you are so open. Because you are.

IX

It is your weight
that hangs upon me. How
to deal with it. Hooded, claws locked
to your body like a star

you drag me under
the light of this occasion
to others. I've dreamed you once
too often. So this

is what it is to drown, this suffocating
torpor, giving up to
the drug of, the drag of
the moon. Here in your kingdom

I feel night harden over
my skull. That we should have come
so far out of the dark
together. I try to drown

well, I hold my breath,
no thrashing. Blue, majestic,
you blaze in my thoughts. Displacing more
than your real weight, making less

than the usual disturbance,
you plunge and take me with you.
I go out
in silence, in full view

of waiters; having learned
this much at least; to die true
to my kind — upright, smiling —
and like, beyond speech.

X

No I am not ashamed
of our likeness, of what is in it that betrays me,
a smell of salt

backwaters, a native
grasp of the gist
of things, our local patch

of not-quite-solid earth from which the vast swing of the sky
is trackable. Night
comes on and I am caught

with a whole life in my hands,
in my mouth raw words,
the taste of so much air, so much water,

flesh. It was never to be weighed,
this dull shore and its landscape, water
poised above water

and all its swarming creatures, against the kingdom of cloud castles
we build with our breath.
But words made you

a fact in my head. You were
myself in another species, brute
blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God.

Now all has been made plain
between us, the weights are equal, though the sky
tilts, and the sun

with a splash I do no hear breaks into
the dark. We are one at last. Assembled here
out of earth, water, air

to a love feast. You lie open
before me. I am ready.
Begin.

Wild Lemons

for Don Dunstan

Through all those years keeping the present
open to the light of just this moment:
that was the path we found, you might call it
a promise, that starting out among blazed trunks
the track would not lead nowhere, that being set
down here among wild lemons, our bodies were
expected at an occasion up ahead
that would not take place without us. One
proof was the tough-skinned fruit among
their thorns; someone had been there before us
and planted these, their sunlight to be sliced
for drinks (they had adapted
in their own way and to other ends); another
was the warmth of our island, sitting still
in its bay, at midnight humming
and rising to its own concerns, but back,
heat-struck, lapped by clean ocean waters
at dawn. The present is always
with us, always open. Though to what, out there
in the dark we are making for as seven o'clock
strikes, the gin goes down and starlings
gather, who can tell? Compacts made
of silence, as a flute tempts out a few
reluctant stars to walk over the water. I lie down
in different weather now though the same body,
which is where that rough track led. Our sleep
is continuous with the dark, or that portion of it
that is this day's night; the body
tags along as promised to see what goes.
What goes is time, and clouds melting into
tomorrow of our breath, a scent of lemons
run wild in another country, but smelling always of themselves.

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Reading a View

Light soars twelve thousand feet into perfect blue. Fires are lit,
smoke disperses
between one line of hills, one fold
of cypress and the next, the next — the eye
moves deeper. Everything
in this view has occurred
before and is repeated leaf on leaf; all's aligned
in the one direction: a spade handle, rain
in broken verticals, a stand of pine that will be next year's
firewood; even our bodies
when we lay them out together
a distance from the earth. Reading a view
is seeing where each thing points, irrespective
of the plane it's in, the arc on which it enters. What
does a sparrow in a hawk's foot
weigh against rocks
in their slow flight, the air
all dust and shelves of light,
arena of the day's real happenings?
We trace a lower path at the garden's edge, tending whatever
flaps, wads, spirals, hurls up sparks. The landscape
burns to be replaced. We are moving into
autumn, we say, or somewhere in that direction.
A leaf would show us where.

Revolving Days

That year I had nowhere to go, I fell in love — a mistake of course, but it lasted and has lasted.

The old tug at the heart, the grace unasked for, urgencies that boom under the pocket of a shirt. What I remember is the colour of the shirts. I'd bought them as an experiment in ways of seeing myself, hoping to catch in a window as I passed what I was to be in my new life as lover: one mint green, one pink, the third, called Ivy League, tan with darker stripes, my first button-down collar.

We never write. But sometimes, knotting my tie at a mirror, one of those selves I had expected steps into the room. In the next room you are waiting (we have not yet taken back the life we promised to pour into each other's mouths forever and for ever) while I choose between changes to surprise you.

Revolving days. My heart in my mouth again, I'm writing this for you, wherever you are, whoever is staring into your blue eyes. It is me, I'm still here. No, don't worry, I won't appear out of that old time to discomfort you. And no, at this distance, I'm not holding my breath for a reply.

White Days White Nights

This journal I have kept
for twenty years

or rather, for nine days running, three times over,
between sixteen and thirty.

Coming to it
again, I wipe my warm breath from the pane
to discover, in the room
that lights up in my head, that solitary
boy, solemn recorder of my life, whose shadow breaks
the lampfall on green baize, or a young man shirtless
in the small grass between lifts, to whom clouds occur
as feelings with the sun
at their edge, translating landscapes out of France

'O saisons ô châteaux'

into night over a border

I recognise
the voice. It is my own. But where
I ask myself is Hirschhorn, who was Mauro?

It is the white pages now
enlighten me, the number of them! Dazzling
rain, the sweat of dawn, boughs stormy
or still under the moon, all those nights lit with excited
hands, the event itself not worth repeating
on brilliant blank pages.

In my body's depths, a shining
as leaves turn, a boy reads over
a young man's shoulder
in an empty field, white, shadowless, at noon.

A Thousand and One Nights

A boy stops open-mouthed: between
one breath and next travels to Baghdad
via Katmandu and back, two decades later finds
the apple in his hand still untasted. Another boy,
whose life the first boy enters through the eye
of a tailor's needle, whose dreams
in the steam of a shaving basin
show his face agape, loiters beside
a blacksmith shop and enters
halfway through a third boy's adventures — for seven years
spellbound, wrecked among brutes
on a black coast, or riding
in oiljars with the Old Man of the Mountains.
Magnetised by chains of such events, and then, and then,
whose lifetime has he spent? A storyteller, sewing
strips of hide, announces
what happens to us next and we are held. Whispering Please
don't let me wake, don't let me
fall, don't let me ever get
home, don't let this story
end.

The Gift, Another Life

for Derck and Jenny Peat

The day's heat dwindles. Having shared
our few late-summer crumbs, the birds
depart. Across the valley shadows
straggle in like herds
of slow sad cattle, hills away
a tin roof flickers out. Familiar
farmhouse stars, a silo plunging
moonward among clouds.

I drowse between pencil pines, the stars
rise through me as in sleep I climb
in the warmth of other arms to meet
myself. Horizons stream
away, all fences down, all frontiers
open. I am free to cross
five oceans. At almost dusk these broken
hills break free of time

and place, four generations pass
where wheel-tracks dent a slope. We share
our lives with ghosts, the future strikes
clear through us, we are here
and gone where crumbling paddocks dream
their first green world ploughed under: feather,
fur, beaked skull, old bush ways opening
upwards into air.

I think of friends on this side of
our star who move alone through sleep
or soar in each other's arms, and you,
out there where planers dip
low on the western rim, approaching
daybreak now, snow patches struck
to pools of crocus, swallows that bring
the first heat from the Cape.

Sunlight or shade the same day holds
us all, our cool green island floats
through space. Soiled, sullied, plundered, we
go with it, at our wits'
end, and world's end maybe, pushing
out to the edge of night. Soon
with what dignity we've kept, and two
by two, our dying planet's

last wild creatures, we and all
our household will set out, with stones
to touch or smell for luck, flag iris,
garlic, grains, a Rubens
landscape, quitting a star we dare
not visit save in dreams, a sacred
garden closed to us; fogbound,
radiant with bones.

But time is time enough. Though all
we do betrays us, earth, dull earth,
still tugs and beckons; pausing from work
its greenness takes our breath.
Field upon field we stride waist high
through voices, the ground is sown with more
than mind can fathom, Love remains
a power to be reckoned with.

And weddings are huge doors open wide
to more than sky or earth: the threshold
shines, the guests arrive — a keg
spiked and carpets rolled
away for dancing; shy beasts stand
witness when later in the dark
a small voice claims of lovers all
they have, a life, a world.

Violence abroad: owls dragged towards
a killing, the dominance of blood.
Sky-bullies roar and swagger. Streets
all fire and cities mad
with a yeasty turbulence as fine jaws
gnash like millstones. Cattle breathe
among boughs and feed on moonlight. Murder,
mischief, plenitude.

Low nightsounds in the grass, another
order. I watch the new moon steer
west over rooftops, wade through dams,
below me cities flare
as pane on pane their towers catch
the sun; its morning light will touch
all sleepers and among them you,
on your side of our star.

Wake softly now. Steep fiords swell,
weirs drain their starlight, thin stalks push
through mud, the night sky tilts and all
its constellations rush
before us, bare cold worlds we shall
inhabit when our world snuffs out.

But later. Light years away their lavas
glow, their deserts flash.

Wake easy. Now the sun comes round
to your side, brimming light expands
over gulf and delta, sickle-shaped
it sweeps the flat wheatlands,
picks out the Alps, then leaf by leaf
chill London parks, squares, bridges, docks.
Earth turns. I turn towards sleep and pass
the day into your hands.

To Be Written in Another Tongue

As for example, the language in which my grandfather
dreams now he is dead, or living,
muttered in his sleep. Clouds

flow to a different breath, daylight moons hatch from the stillness
of a different dark,
where owls drop from the sun, dirt-coloured starlings

by other names than we know them gather
the dusk, grain by grain let fall the shadow of their bodies.
Such ordinary events

are poems in another tongue and no translation
possible. Owl
with its heavy blood and vowel an open mouth

too slow to snatch the heads off
dustnotes. Humming-birds
like Giotto's tear-stained kamikaze angels

sorrow, having learned
their name in a dead language
is entrée to a steel-meshed aviary or Table of Contents,

some grey *Jardin des Plantes*. Grandfather mumbles
our names in the earth. We come
to light out of his mouth, oracular bubbles.

I range through the thesaurus
for a word: homesickness, yearning
of grandsons for a language

the dead still speak, the dying in their sleep still
mutter, the advent
of common objects, strange upon the tongue.

An Essay on Angels --- the short version

1

Have never seen one but being
curious am always
on the lookout, as I was
in childhood for white horses. Those

I did see, mostly
more than I had fingers
for, and though
expected, extraordinary.

Do I recall
the first, and having
before that none
to go by, how I knew it? Will I again?

Paddocks were empty
without, but rooms are not, and streets
are stocked, even over-
stocked with the imperfect, some

quite perfect enough.
The shock will come
later, when looking
back we see how struck

we were that things should be
so changed
and still
themselves, when we are not.

2

Restless. A haystack
of jubilant straws, muscle,
wingtip the fools

of flight. Restless. Eyelid
and nerve all quick flame, curl,
ear-whorl, heel uplifted.

Stillness only
in the eye of this storm, as
subdued by gravity,

it weighs
the flesh and its surprises.
Attending on the world.

3

No tempting
them who are beyond
temptation with the scent
of herbs, old clothes, suitcases.

No calling
those who have no name
they'd wish to step back into.
They are past

all that, and that
is all we have: names,
hold-alls, smell and ghost smell
of where we were or would be.

Their gift is being
where they are. Waiting for breath
to release us, we fall
towards them. Idly

distracted, they turn away.
Then idly, on the hinge
of a second thought turn
back, and we are caught.

4

A preliminary
lightening, as of
air thinning out,
a room ballooning upwards.

We might need to be
at a certain altitude, even
at ground level, to bring
their heat into focus.

After that, all will be
just as it is
and should be. One,
half-kneeling to unlatch

his shoe, not even needing
to smile for you to get
the message, and no exchange
of names, just *This*

is for you, I think, and in
the hollow of his palm
nothing. The gift

we cannot reject.

5 Unborn Angel

The message in its mouth
a stalled breath. Bones in aspic,
wing-feathers still sticky-
moist in their sac.

Below, occasions
fail that should stir
to its calling:
famine in the ear

of corn no raindrop reaches,
a tyrant's heart
untouched, ditches
crammed with the meat

of born, unangelic
herds whose groans are bundled
skyward to stop the hole
that this one left unfilled.

Shit happens. Saturn rules.

6

Curled up like candied peel
in there
somewhere, and impish,
I've learned to live
with you and your nonesuch
notions and spills.

More carnal
even than I
at times can cope with, your
take on the angelic
leaves me
standing. A question

of balance? But somersaults
are not
my forte, or getting into
a pickle for the sheer
hell of it
my style of razzmatazz.

Une petite messe solennelle
your every
maladroit adventure,
heels kicked up

to magnify this
heaven you aspire to,

the flesh. Its gravity,
its rapturous
assembly of smells,
the sadsack bag
of tricks you'll never get,
poor worm, to the end of.

A History Lesson

Sweaty after a bout the young prince towels his body,
sprawls against the wall of a tennis court. His body seems
his own. He is seventeen, loves exercise,
apples, and has just discovered order
in the frets of a guitar and the disorder
his spirit leans towards where hair sweeps upward
and a tender neck's laid bare. All this
is normal.

Miles away,
his body is the site of negotiations. Old men in furs
have laid it out between them, a treaty
is tied to the royal member as, by proxy, it is annexed, with no compliance
on his part (it is, so far as he knows, off
in a goosegirl's placket) to the crib of a ten months' orphan, the Staatsholder
of nine dependencies.

Somewhere peasants
work in the prince's groin, sleep off the day's work in its shade.
They will speak the same *patois* when they go back
to dealing with horizons, but their heads
have passed under harsher laws. In a trench twelve pikemen
curse white, blow on a fist as night creeps over
the edge of a boy's body much like theirs and also forfeit.

These lives go other ways
than the documents intended. The young prince
will swell with evil fluids not drained off, his infant
be occupied by three foreign husbands; she will never know his tongue.
One of that band of pikemen, every hair
on his head ablaze with firelight, every louse in his shirt assured of
its sweat, will get his wish. He will climb on out
of the blood of battle, eat, in a fiery sunset,
a late crust among shadows
that peck round a harvest blade, and whistling an old song, track
to its source among ferns the stream
that mutters in his head and never once says 'history'.

But that is another story. Passed from mouth
to mouth and not set down, it covers the facts, has a beginning and has survived
its middle. Why shouldn't it end well?

Elegy: The Absences

G.M., 1896-1964

Tree crickets tap tap tap. They are tunneling
their way out of the dark; when they break through,
their dry husks will be planets. Little sheep-bells
clink. The sheep are finding their way down
through clouds, and fence by fence into the distance
dogs bark, clearing ditches, marking farms.
Much that is living here goes into the mouth
of night or issues from it. I sleep, and silence
climbs into my ear, the land blacks out, all
that was delicate and sharp subdued with fog.
The dead are buried in us. We dream them
as they dreamed us and woke and found us
flesh. Their bones rise through us. These are your eyes:
you will see a new world through them. This is your tongue
speaking. These are your hands, even in sleep
alert like animals. Stumbling on
down known paths through blackberry canes I happen
on details that insist. They scratch, they drag
their small hooks, they whiplash, they draw blood.

You balloon above me, a big cloud burning
with breath; a coolness settles on my skin.
Your hands that could manage
things gone wrong, stopped clocks, a generator
with the devil in it, roughly set me right.

You talk, you stroke my brow, I come back into
the house: clean plates on shelves, the simple view
— a world that's workable.
I'm safe, I'm held. As when you found a greenie's
thin-shelled, sky-pale egg and brought it to me. Look,
you said. I looked. In the round nest of your hand
a landscape, water, stories, even my own
small life. In your palm,
roughened from work, a cat's cradle of lines,
leading to where I was, to where I am.

In a century when it was some men's fate to be
marshaled into firing squads, and others'
to go to the wall (the meat-eating

angels of those years snapped through the air
like bullets and left wounds that peace could not
grow over; even those like you who lived

at peace had also bled); in a century
when wheat crops passed three times through the same belly
as mud, as mud, a man walked out

of a tale you told and stood knee-deep in ashes
on the moon. Your days so common I can find
no mark of 'history'. But I see you rub

a sore place on your skull, wondering where
it struck, what day, what hour, and how
you picked up the beginnings of a story we

are seeing, no not the end but say the climax
of. The man goes on out of your mouth and into
silence, hangs on a breath. What happens next?

You bore my image long enough, the promise
of it, looking clean through the bodies
of women to where I stood beside the river
waiting, pitching stones. No wonder I stand there
still. No wonder I bear the image of you
to the edge of streams in every weather, looking
back through the bodies
of women, strangers, searching for the one
door I must come through. I look back
through it, beyond the wars: a regatta day;
grass, white lace verandas. You are there. You are looking
towards me. The woman is still, turning neither
your way nor mine, she does not know us.
She will.
The river is always the same river.
Stones skip light across it. Generations
of fish, wave upon wave, shoulder upstream.

You knew about absences. I am learning
slowly how much space they occupy
in any house I move to, any page — the white spaces
no ink flows into, the black ones
no breath flows out of, mouths. My mother lived
for eight years in your absence. Now we make room
for hers. The ghostly bodies we grew out of
are still somewhere within us. We look through them
to what lies ahead. Back behind

is greener than it was for all those deaths.

The house catches its breath. I go downstairs
in the dark: stars at the window, a tap drips
cold. I stoop and drink from a cupped hand,
cradling the sweet water. It is more
than water when I lift it to my lips.

A barefoot child on the cool boards of a house
I left decades ago, I pause and hear
your footfall on the landing. *Is that you*
son? I dare not answer. If I went and stood
in the dark well looking up, would you be there?

Seven Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian

*Animula vagula blandula
hospes comesque corporis,
quae hunc abibis in loca,
pallida, rigida, nudula,
nec, ut soles, dabis iocos?*

1.

Dear soul mate, little guest
and companion, what
shift will you make
now, out there
in the cold?
If this is a joke,
it is old, old.

2.

Soul, small wandering one,
my lifelong companion,
where will you go
— numb, pale, undefended —
now the joke we shared is ended?

3.

Little lightfoot
spirit, house
mate, bedfellow, where are you off
to now? Cat got
your tongue? Lost your shirt, caught
your death? Well, the last laugh
is on you. Is on us.

4.

Sweet urchin, fly
-by-night, heart's guest, my
better half and solace,
you've really done it
this time. You've played one trick
too many. Fool, you've laughed us
both out of breath.

5.

If this is one of your jokes,
my jack, my jack-in-the-box,
lay off. Where

have you got to?
It's cold out there.
And what will you do
without me, you sweet idiot? Go naked?
Homeless? Come back to bed.

6.

What's this, old mouse, my secret
sharer? Gone
where? Did you think I'd let
you slip away without me after
a lifetime of happy scrapes? Who
warmed you, clothed you, fed you, paid with laughter
for your tricks, your japes? Is this the one
joke, poor jackanapes, dear bugaboo,
your emperor does not get?

7.

So you're playing fast
and loose, are you? You've cut
the love knot. Well let's see how you get
on out there without me. Who's kidding
who? Without my body, its royal
breath and blood to warm you, my hands, my tongue
to prove to you what's real,
what's not, poor fool, you're nothing.
But O, without you, my sweet nothing,
I'm dust.

Reading Horace outside Sydney, 1970

The distance is deceptive: Sydney glitters invisible
in its holocaust of air, just thirty miles away, in Rome
two thousand years from here, a goosequill scrapes, two crack divisions
are hurled against a furclad, barbarous northern people pushing

south into history; small throats are cut at committee-tables,
a marriage dies in bed; bald officials like old pennies
worn smooth by time and trade were once my copper-keen school-fellows,
who studied Cicero and shook their heads over the fall

of virtue in high places; now on pills twelve storeys high
in air, they shake their heads and fall and pause and walk again.
Somewhere across a border shabby barefoot warriors
stumble into grass, an empire mourns, in small wars seeking

safe boundaries against death. Over the traffic, over the harbour, lions
roar, schoolboys scramble out of nightmares, mineral stocks
fall with a noiseless crash, the sigh of millions; cicadas
are heard, shrill under stones, in the long suspension of our breath.

Out here wheat breathes and surges, poplars flare. On the highway lorries
throb towards city squares. High in the blue a Cessna bi-plane
cropdusting lucerne turns to catch the sun. The brilliant granule
climbs on out of sight. Its shadow dances in my palm.

From a Plague Year

A sign first in the sky, then other tokens,
but plainer, on the flesh. June's thirty suns
flared and we were tinder. Flies appeared
and bubbled in pools, their green gaze multiplied
the dead. But we, the elected, all that term
kept house, kept shop, kept silence, knowing no harm
would come to us. We paid our taxes, served
on juries, saw men punished or reprieved
from death under the law. God's eye
was on us. Like a red-hot cautery
it pricked and burned. *Who keep His just commandments
shall live. No terror can afflict the saints.*

But still each week the numbers swell, the needle
glows. In a devil's covenant, through all
the colours of the rainbow, pale flesh bruises
black, then stinks and softens. We stop our noses,
the death-cloud blooms. We find its dark seeds scattered
like sunshine, everywhere.

And so we board
our houses up, burn pitch, read in the Book
and choke. By day no footfall, no wheel's creak
in the cobbled square. At night the town's aswarm
with cries, a fearful traffic. Dung-carts climb
to where, in moonlit fields, whole families meet
at the real it's edge, new nameless suburbs greet
new citizens; they seethe like privy holes.

Some say the plague's a rat, soft-bellied squeals
in the rushes underfoot, a red-eyed fever
that glares. Or blame the Jews. Or claim the air
itself turns poisonous; where warm breath clouds
a glass invisible armies spawn, one word's
enough to quell a city. It is death
we suck on now. The plague in our mouth.

No help! Gender of spiders on the tongue
that preaches, curses, pleads, God's judgment wrung
in black sweat from our limbs. Are we in Bedlam
or is it Hell that rocks us with its flame?
The sickness in this month is grown so general
no man can judge. It comes to this: we kill
our neighbours with the very prayers we sigh
to Heaven. O my Lord, spare me, spare me.

Epitaph for a Monster of Our Times

The age admires precision
and this man was precise,
a passion for names and numbers,
they say, his only vice;

a kindly man, with blue
and inoffensive eyes,
a public servant, slightly
smaller than lifesize,

who sat at his desk, a slave
to files and paper-clips,
while children died and cities
burned at his fingertips;

a Caligula by proxy,
stiff-collared, dispassionate,
whose crablike hand kept entry
of number, name and date,

using the regulation
form, the official quill,
to sign with equal flourish
death-warrant, laundry bill;

an organization man
par excellence, whom we
need only convict at last
of gross efficiency.

Typewriter Music

Hinged grasshopper legs kick
back. So
quick off the mark, so
spritely. They set
the mood, the mode, the call
to light-fingered highjinks.

A meadow dance
on the keyboard,
in breathless, out-of-bounds
take-offs into
flight and giddy joyflight without
stint. The fingerpads

have it. Brailling through
études of alphabets, their chirp and clatter
grass-choppers
the morning to soundbites,
each rifleshot hammerstroke another notch
in the silence.

Mythologies

In the old days it was easy:
enough to recognize
a god or two benignly
winking above the sill, barely surprised
if a bull you stroked
with blue eyes and a lovecurl
between his horns tried it
on or a swan came thwacking
your thighs. There were charms
to be laid out in the sun and rhymes
to mutter. Girls had been made
into stars before Hollywood,
and no bobby-soxer
of my day, alone
on Naxos, would have refused
Sinatra. The lives
of the brightest of us fitted
on a Fantales wrapper. Satan
had a black smudge under
his nose, answered to Hitler. And history
happened but we weren't in it, only kings.

And now where are we? Lost
in the Supermarket, hesitating over
Gustav Mahler's Greatest Hits
and Kitty Kat or Zen, a god-sized phallic
vibrator and deodorants
(vaginal) to suit all tastes from Crêpes au Kümmel
to strawberry double-malted. The stars
are gaseous and real. Aerosol
evenings rocket us
skyward — the occasion's
a forest, Breath o' Pine; and we, Monsieur Rochas and Madam,
recline on a Numdah rug while Ali Akhbar
Khan beats up
a raga. Even the cats
come to us out of Asia
on snowy paws, the small bones of their fathers,
to inhabit a yawn. Rubbing the silence
their fur picks up the static
of distant meteors, their nightlong metal-shrill
lovebouts set our nerves
on edge. But if the gods
still deign, it is surely
in one of these. Green eyes
tuned to a stately music, looking past us
and our sad preoccupations,

they glide between our legs
like Zeus; forgotten powers
stir. Only the time is not propitious.
Old charms laid out
in the sun catch nothing
but a headcold or a bad case of sunburn. For both
of which we have remedies:
the right cure for the wrong, the fatal ill.

The Fables

To interpret the wood you first must fall
asleep in it, feel
its breathing lift your ribs, turn
owls out of a pocket
of fog, rub fur
in your groin and sense the hardening
of fingernails, of toenails
to horn. After that
communication's easy. You may eavesdrop on the follies of citizens
of the other kingdom, preach
to birds. And when the fabulist
comes home, sleepwalking
the streets of a town
where his father flourished in the butcher's act, he will suffer
them all, the solemn beasts — ox, magpie, lion,
and mad March hare; slipping
away at dusk to take his small wolf brothers
with fables, teaching them
to know — dreaming buckets
of thick sow's blood — themselves transformed, turned skinside out, forgiven
the crimes they move to in their guise are men.

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Suburban

Safe behind shady carports, sleeping under
the stars of the Commonwealth and nylon gauze.

Asia is far off, its sheer white mountain-peaks, its millions
of hands. Shy bush-creatures in our headlamps

prop and swerve; small grass under the sprinklers
dreams itself ten feet tall as bull ants lumber

between its stems, but leans
towards Sunday morning and the motor blades.

Safe behind lawns and blondwood doors, in houses
of glass. No one throws stones. The moon dredges

a window square. Chrome fittings
hold back the tadpole life that swarms in dams.

But there are days
after drinks at the Marina when dull headaches

like harbour fog roll in, black cats give off
blackness, children writhe out of our grip,

and only the cottonwool in medicine bottles stands between us
and the capsules whose cool metallic colours

lift us to the stars. Barefoot we drift
in sleep to the edge of town; pale moondust flares between our toes,

ghosts on a rotary hoist fly in the wind.
Under cold white snowpeaks tucked to the chin we stare

at an empty shoe like Monday.
Sunlight arranges itself beyond our hands.

Summer

Here all things responsive:
fresh to the steady warmth
of flesh that all day soaks up sunlight, giving
it back now like the rocks,
your body giving of its warm sea-salt.

Now smooth house timbers shed
their gold, to the cool touch of the evening air
responding nail and rafter.
This house has a single room. The door to your room
opens and I'm there.

No walls, air shifting free through the open windows,
swirling of light in ears
and hands, in cups on shelves, and washing over
our salty nakedness; at dawn a net
of sea-light on the floor.

Sandgrains, the insect simmer
of grass; heat-ripples float the house away
and we're more than one step now
above the earth. Clouds move in mirrors, the limitless Pacific
rocks in their frames.

Happy: the foam and glitter
of leaves, smooth water combing
white over green over seal rock's grey and black.
Our bodies hoard their summer. We approach
the sun's banked fire at midnight when we touch.

First Night

A high dry attic room under warped pine-shingles.
In the crisp air a scent
of last month's pears in straw, sheets folded on their laundry smell
of soap and sky, an ironing-
board, its hoof-shaped scorchmarks the ghost
of old stains and burning.
We slept well
and deep in that mountain cold. Our breath went
out, dense with our bodies' warmth, and found no less a welcome
in that place than in others.

It is always
a high room we climb to. The pears
might be garden tools, the laundry hay, the ironing-board an angel
disguised by birthday wrappings; the same
breath goes out, not always visible,
to join them. And they always, with the humility of those
who are just themselves, make room
for us. As when
we first lay down among them and slept the sleep of the innocent
on unsettled ground, the first night out of Eden.

An Ordinary Evening at Hamilton

The garden shifts indoors, the house lets fall
its lamp light, opens
windows in the earth

and the small stars of the grass, the night insects,
needlepoint
a jungle more dense
than any tapestry, where Saturn burns, a snow owl's nest,
and melons feed

their crystal with hot sugars of the moon. The Pacific
breaks at our table,
each grain

of salt a splinter of its light at midday, deserts
flare on the lizard's tongue. Familiar rooms
glow, rise through the dark – exotic islands; this house

a strange anatomy
of parts, so many neighbours in a thicket:
hair, eyetooth, thumb.

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Nocturnal

A June night. Frosty stars
whirr above paddocks, breathless
treadle machines
in the pale grass hemming
sheets for a ghost dance.

Darkness creeps in under
a hedge. Its eye is on
the pullets, starlight sharp
in its jaw, blood
warm in the pullet's throat.

It is earlier than blood,
this landscape, and darker.
We make it,
we stare into
our heads to make it out.

Another landscape shakes
its dust from our bones.
Our bodies grow
lighter. They grow
light as we enter it.

Stars

Its licking round our knees a shy demand
for closeness. When we looked
up, the sleepy stretch and dazzle of it
took us
out and further out than thought could reach.

First apprehension
of distance: the far, the near.
When night came on
in the wet sand instant
galaxies — look! — stamped out under our feet.

Afterword

After a whole day pressed
by crowds, the close, the loud
lives, some of them those
of loved ones or ones
nearly loved, the joy
of finding you here, embodied
silence I need not fill,

at ease after the roads
you've travelled and with just
a trace on your skin,
in the scent you give off, of what
you bring me, the light
you'll pour into my mouth
of fields where on the way

you rested. *But not
tonight*, you say,
not yet your smile assures me.
*We are alone. No need between us
for speech. Take
your time. Eat the last
of the apple. Finish your wine.*

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

b. 1934

Born in Melbourne, Australian poet Chris Wallace-Crabbe is the son of a pianist and a journalist. He earned a BA at Melbourne University and attended Yale University. Wallace-Crabbe's wry yet expansive poems mix high and low diction to sometimes startling effect. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, critic Eric Ormsby referred to Wallace-Crabbe as "a genial smuggler of surprises," noting, "His uncommon affability, even when treating the gravest subjects, leaves the reader unprepared for his sudden luxuriance of phrase."

Wallace-Crabbe is the author of more than a dozen collections of poetry, including *By and Large* (2001); *Selected Poems 1956–1994* (1995), which won the Dinny O'Hearn Poetry Prize; *The Amorous Cannibal* (1985), which won the Grace Leven Prize for Poetry; and *Blood Is the Water* (1969), which won the Farmer's Poetry Prize. He also published the novel *Splinters* (1981) and several critical works, including *Read It Again* (2005) and *Falling into Language* (1990). He has edited numerous anthologies, including *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World* (2004, with Judith Ryan), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (1998, with Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss), and *The Golden Apples of the Sun: Twentieth Century Australian Poetry* (1980).

In 2011, Wallace-Crabbe was awarded the Order of Australia. Over the course of his career, he has received the St. Michael's Medal, the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal, the Human Rights Award for Poetry, and the Christopher Brennan Award for Literature. Founding director of the Australian Center at Melbourne University, he has taught at Harvard and Yale Universities. He lives in Melbourne.

Loving in Truth

Someone will push the house over one day,
Some spacedozer give it a shove,
But the cobbles we laid down here in the yard,
These are a labour of love.

All winter we set these cobbles in place,
Or was it the summer as well?
Sorting through lumpy bluestone pitchers
For ones that looked suitable.

The old house decayed – along with us –
Will a strange new resident
Admire the patio made in joy
Wondering what we meant?

Things fall apart, the poet wrote,
Certainties crumble and move
But the cobbles oddly plotted together,
These are our labour of love.

Why Do We Exist?

The child sits, quiet as a moth,
under murmuring trees in the garden,
a blackbird warbling grandly,
wrens and wattlebirds
doing their various things
overhead and around,

and the child knows
he is very small in the garden,
smaller still in the world,
as nothing in the ...
how do you call it? ...
universe.
So that his being there,

fragile in a rustling suburban garden
among heaving ripples of green,
is a kind of miracle.

In the end he is grateful.

The Bush

for Seamus Heaney

Overture:
violins:
it is all scraggy,
wideawake,
ironical,
decked out
in denim fatigues.
Witty and welcoming,
leathery-evergreen,
bemedalled with beercans,
cowpat and wallaby-dung,
flap,
nub,
hinge,
node,
blindeye quartzite,
wafery sandstone,
bright as a button
subtle for mile on mile
far from vulgarity
(far from sleek Europe)
in its array of
furniture tonings
sheeted by sunglaze
lovingly dusted,
wispy and splintery,
tussocky,
corduroy,
all of its idiom
dry as a thesis
to moist outsiders:
wonderfully eloquent
on its home ground,
branchful of adverbs,
lovingly
wombat-hued,
dreamily
sheeptoned,
fluted with scalloping surf
and every step a joke.

There Is Another World But It Is In This One

When the unspeakable has taken place
or even almost
landscape cannot help,
music is up to no good

and food cannot pick you up,
balanced on brink of nausea
with bellygripping pangs,
shitting yellow like a baby.

Books and slog do their level best
but cannot help for long
as the compass arrows home
to that knob of horror.

Try, need, to grapple sleep
and you wake on your sodden pillow
tacky as plum jam,
then shiver your arse off.

The answering bay of calm
is probably religious
but you lost your way to all that salt coherence
two centuries ago.

A bloke walks tentatively
in my direction carrying
the yellowed skeleton of a bulldog
on a polished plank

and not a bloody thing
can, yet, now, quite stop me feeling
we are connected to a coursing stream or tide
incomparably larger than ourselves.

It is pure thought of the water
forky with wreathing rivulets
calms that sickness under my heart
until

I tick-tock once more, rue, recall
it was one of those ropy spangles
threw up like a dice
the fate-blow, and all seems again

like Darwin's tangled bank
whereon the lovely millefleurs blow
round killer birds or insect wars
malign as melanomas.

What is the crossing or clew between
that which means god
(that which God means, comedian)
and this cheeknipping brown souwesterly

puffing between trading banks'
renaissance-resurrection porticoes
flaunting their red granite colonnades
and rivery marble cheek?

The History of the World

Froth, nodules, granular dynasties,
a glacier dragging
its non-existent heels
artistically through rock.

Nature, Language, The Sea: An Essay

*But what of the artist? Has he either knowledge
or correct belief?— The Republic*

With such worn currency of models as
Rivers and steps and roads, the mind
Does much of its diurnal labour;

Analogies its glory and its task,
Into the shambling mess we call
Creation it plunges, asking 'Why?'

For the world is wonder, is profusion,
A boundless brilliant orchard of
Sun-licked, thunder-shaken strangeness,

But nobody can claim it makes good sense
Or testifies to providence:
O, the mistakes of a creator!

Nature, language, sea: our great examples
Of what must always be rebuked
By the modest radiance of art.

Where the thick ridges of a mountain range,
Ruffled with unbroken forest
And innocent of bridge or roadway,

Roll like a stiff surf out from under you
In one great Burkean rhythm
To shout, Sublime, Sublime, O Sublime,

And the gullies brim with a steely blue mist,
Is there, as your heart takes pause,
Anything heard but a hymn of chaos?

There are no sermons in the Great Divide;
The boundless overflows and
Its tide is no river of symbols;

Yet symbols must rise glittering from some
Quick river or sullen current,
Dying as soon as their surface dries,

And sound roots must aspire from common soil
Earning a sudden right to bear
The fire-featured apples of the sun.

Nature, language, the sea; and opposite
These fluent fields of energy
We feel that we are bound to chisel

The small hard statues of our poetry
Which bear, like a sheen on marble,
Burnished assurance of being right,

All the assurance that we come to know
Under the name of Form, and know
In the strong humming of completeness

Wherein the formal is at last the good.
Both passionate and moral is
Music which has passed into a shape,

A river which has found its dimpling course
Through the golden fields of Chronos,
Sounding not of loss but clarity.

Sonnets to the Left

I

What do I get from progress? I rejoice
In antibiotics, the dental drill, clean drains:
Perhaps a little bit in aeroplanes.
Deutsche Grammophon and His Master's Voice
Pump a magical suasion through the air
So that we all have orchestras to hand
Or history on deck like contraband,
Bartok and Bach concurrent everywhere.

Slavery's dead. An evening chill now falls
Rather more golden; autumn shadows flit.
I wander round these white functional walls
Trying to find a frame in which to fit
Large things that progress bundles out of sight:
Grief, awe, terror, transcendent light.

II

(i.m. *Fudah Waten*)

As we grind into the worst decade for two
Or three or four, I swing around and see
Your bulky, suited, Russian form push through
This or that minor bookish jamboree
Smiling, and think of old hostility,
Those years when I watched you hard for Stalinism's
Cloven hoof and you (I'm sure) marked me
As bourgeois formalist. Time burns the isms.

Now Toorak and Balmain contrive to read
Marx as ur-text, floppy aesthetes delight
In cushioning off him too. The game is bent
Till we've become old colleagues with a need
For shoring words against the tide of night,
Praying the slow bitch History might relent.

III

There used to be a time, as I recall,
Where 'Left' involved the proletariat;
I like to think that might be where it's at
But fear it's grown up theoretical—
Or else gone troppo and turned Libyan.
For years it strove with muscular intent
To keep the ALP from government,
But we've now crowned that gross amphibian.

Soft acker vikings cross a phantom sea

Hoping to put old systems to the axe
And loading up their vocab, trend by trend;
Joying in papery perversity
The deconstructors lie down on their backs
And let our Marxists rape them, in the end.

IV

The writer depersonalizes his dreamwork,
A single being in search of voices,
But change is learned from the outside world
Preoccupied with drink and kissing.
Unhappiness is the funniest thing,
It is a play about the ego
Needing to choose a lifelong project
Through tea and comfortable advice.

How can anyone be called guilty
From the perspective of the trapped
And struggling fly? Perhaps the itsy-
Bitsy is proof against despair,
Knowing between the fork and the knife
All our beyond is in this life.

V

We look edgewise
Through this our dishy galaxy
And see thick jewellery
Spattered across an empty sky
But our damp cries
Balloon at last through history
Which does not leave for personal foolery
So much as a footnote or sigh.

What'll we do with the mystical
Now that red buttons think beneath our thumbs
And secular hope is built upon a rock?
Turn to the fantastical:
In furious rubber last of all there comes
The hooded cyclist with the duck-beak cock.

VI

Look, mate, you roll new brands of foreign cringe
With which to snow the members of your branch.
You are a proper old conceptual stinge
And where you gesture at an avalanche
We only see the dreck of magazines,
Half-baked ideas, half-read, near understood;
You reckon you have proved you're full of beans
By squeaking, 'Foucault,' through the sacred wood.

Cling to your books and views of bin-end booze;

That way you won't get dogshit on your shoes
Tailing along to popular festivals.
Look,
something real is happening out there
And when you finally notice, then, I fear
The feminists will have you by the balls.

VII

Tell this to Yale and Paris, tell Pan Am,
Bloody imperialism never ends;
However much Big Brother dubs us friends
He'll roll us up and dump us off the tram
At the drop of a hat. Ah, *dump* ... yes, dump:
That is the linchpin of imperial trade
When the time comes to slip the masquerade
And knife your friends under the doom flag, SLUMP.

Australia first, and last, and in between
Australia once again, is playing safe,
Even for us, the rigorous aesthetes.
High art begins from kids' play in the streets
And local heroes earn the long last laugh:
Ocker, metaphysical, obscene.

VIII

Through a green, social afternoon
As to and fro the emptied bottles roll
This question rises, bleary, out of tune:
Can a fuckwit have an immortal soul?
When shall the vulgar court the lyrical
And bullshit fertilize the laurel crown?
When will cute images delight us all
With ratbag stylists going on the town?

Only when stories happen on a seam
Whose gist gets memorized from north to south,
Swimming through mythology like a dream:
The dingo with a baby in its mouth.
Fuckwit and smartarse, trendocrats and folk,
Nothing unites them like a dingo joke.

IX

De Tocqueville said (he really didn't say)
That in the art of democratic nations
The brittle courtly forms will shred away
And be turfed out by more offensive fashions.
O.K.
Sing of the footy, sun, red wine,
Green surf that batters on this ridgy coast
And then, as redolent as turpentine,
The spirit of the place: our compound ghost.

I like this rhyme, so how about a toast
To that bold Rhadamanthus, tough Jack Lang,
Our patriot whatever (oops!) the cost,
Whose name, returning like a boomerang
Led to this rough platoon of sonnetry
Affirming Land Rights and democracy.

X

Sweet as a clarinet the dawn returns;
I hone my slang aubade, damn sure that our
Priorities are not the Comintern's.
Land Rights lie deeper in the soil than power,
Being the native debt, profound as trees
Turning metallic leafblades to the sun
In morning's natural order. Pieties
Deem that this act of ritual be done.

News twangs a bleeding knell for every age
Or else a snotty-grey decline, unless
We've laid out clear proposals down the page
To crank ourselves out of a fiscal mess,
But if ideals have something left in hand
Tribal sites will peacock a beige land.

Practical Politics

Suppose this edict were proclaimed today—
Let poets and philosophers be kings.

Let poets and philosophers be kings
Four days a week while under careful guard

By senior public servants and the press;
Suppose this edict were proclaimed today,

Four days a week while under careful guard
Sages could walk the parliamentary round

And make some tiny changes in the state
Until they had been sobered by such things.

Suppose this edict were proclaimed today
By senior public servants and the press—

Let poets and philosophers be kings
Four days a week while under careful guard—
Sages could walk the parliamentary round
Until they had been sobered by such things.

Bendigo

Octopus
fettucine in the Shamrock;
fourteen holes
at Eaglehawk amid the ruinous goldfield,
pustular with knolls of slate and quartz
from saddle reefs long since
burrowed and ransacked for their dobs of gold;
muesli bars back at Golden Square
and the dismal
moods of haywire rain mooching in
from Buckrabanyule way.

On View Street
the Gallery as cold as charity's uncle
now sports
Brack, Withers, Boyd and gaudy Cossington Smith,
behind them acres of nineteenth-century crap
snapped up in job lots.

Descend now into Central Deborah
with a miner's lamp
clamped on your bobbing head like Virgil,
treading the drives and crosscuts
through shabby strata,
and wait in vain darkness, as you always do,
for an outrageous nugget
to hit you in the eye.

Of course
it doesn't turn up, given that
all has been gone over like old books.
It's high time,
if time is ever a matter of altitude,
to step on the gas
out past lazy Kangaroo Flat
and the smiles of sheep.

Melbourne

Not on the ocean, on a muted bay
Where the broad rays drift slowly over mud
And flathead loll on sand, a city bloats
Between the plains of water and of loam.
If surf beats, it is faint and far away;
If slogans blow around, we stay at home.

And, like the bay, our blood flows easily,
Not warm, not cold (in all things moderate),
Following our familiar tides. Elsewhere
Victims are bleeding, sun is beating down
On patriot, guerrilla, refugee.
We see the newsreels when we dine in town.

Ideas are grown in other gardens while
This chocolate soil throws up its harvest of
Imported and deciduous platitudes,
None of them flowering boldly or for long;
And we, the gardeners, securely smile
Humming a bar or two of rusty song.

Old tunes are good enough if sing we must;
Old images, re-vamped ad nauseam,
Will sate the burgher's eye and keep him quiet
As the great wheels run on. And should he seek
Variety, there's wind, there's heat, there's frost
To feed his conversation all the week.

Highway by highway, the remorseless cars
Strangle the city, put it out of pain,
Its limbs still kicking feebly on the hills.
Nobody cares. The artists sail at dawn
For brisker ports, or rot in public bars.
Though much has died here, little has been born.

City

When you enter some part of a city
that is completely strange
what excitement leaps inside you,
what delight,
milkbars and palms whirling like paradise,
each trim corner the colours of promise,
verandahs dancing,
stucco ready to please the eye.
I am good fortune
I am your future
I am the names of forgotten men,
it seems to say.

The Other Melbourne

From Scottish rigour
And Victorian gold
They built an icon,
Something solid
You could touch and hold,
While at the angles
Of a spacious
Dove-grey city
They would stand
Honing the razor of
A radical mistrust,
A cutting-edge of reason,
Something to have in hand,
Something to show
That in the balmiest season
A conscience of cold steel
Endured below.

A City Might Be

A city might be
The shape of a tree
With shooting roots in brick and stone
And a constant aspiration
To airs unknown
In green on green exfoliation
Where it might
Rustle in moonlight
On its own continuous wood,
A thronged and swaying paradigm,
Not yearning for the good
Of some lost time
Or distant natural place
To rebuke its fallen face,
But spirit rising quick and sound
From the body's fertile ground.

Victoria Park Station

Down here a windy city lies
Humped and crowded, black on black;
Can a watcher realize
Why the scene before his eyes
Stirs the heart and conjures back

Stronger images of man
Than the single rose or tree?
Living images that began
Out of the essential plan
Of creatures in society.

Through this darkened station run
The arteries of trains which bleed
The city's proper heart; though none
Can isolate that Helicon
From suburbs which will not recede

Out of the tangled unity
Of man with man and part with part.
Look out from this high place and see
The still lights as analogy—
Interdependent yet apart.

The wind is rising down the line,
But stacks and hills maintain their rest
Under the night sky. Clear design
Shadows this city to refine
The wandering heart and empty breast.
Our individualists recline
In rude graves in the distant west.

In Light and Darkness

To the noonday eye, light seems an ethical agent,
Straight from the shoulder, predictable, terribly quick, though
It climbs in a curve to space's unlikely limit,
Thus posing a problem for mathematicians and God,
Whatever He turns out to be and wherever His dwelling.
Rich is the clotting of gold in the late afternoon or
Turning to twilight, one last blaze of watery colour
Where man can project his false dreams in figures of light,
Pretending that all his environment loyally loves him,
Seas of ice and burning plains.

Too easy
Bending nature before us, but light is defiant
Coming by night from dead stars with terrible speed.
So is our planet rebuked, and we meet in mirrors
Desperate masks, eyes of imprisoned strangers
And lips that open to say, 'We are only mirages,'
While the lawns outside are green and the roses real.

You dub the sun a realist? Then it will plague you,
Wading with stork-legs into the green water,
Lending the oak-bole moss its leopard shadows
Or streaking paddocks darkly with sunset sheep
Fifty feet long.
Nothing is quite so rococo
As dawnlight caught on a fishscale formation of cirrus,
Nor quite so romantic as one gilded westering biplane.
We just don't live in a hard intellectual glare.

No one, of course, endures darkness or daylight entirely:
Cyclic change betrays our terrestrial journey
And what looked like trees at dawn turn out to be crosses,
Suddenly black as the florid sun goes down,
And maybe at midnight resemble gallows or statues
As we slip past, childlike, alone.
No wonder
Sly poets admiringly use, but will not warm to
The subtle machines that teach our world to spin.

These are too steady for reverence: gods must be changeable
Since worship is saved for what we cannot govern;
Gods push up grass, channel the dense sap through pine-boughs
And amass the pewter cloudbanks of summer storm.

Once I awoke, a child in a chill mountain morning,
To see the small town—undreamed transfiguration—
Mantled in white, its slate and stone and timber
Bright with that foreign cloak of innocence.

And I walked into old-world beauty; the gilt sun rising
Fell in a garden where time itself was congealing
As we shaped wonderful igloos under the stringybarks
And took no account of thaw. But noon came on.
Something was lost in the brown receding slush there
Which has not returned, something other than childhood:
A notion, rather, of clear crystalline standards
Freezing life to one shape, like a photograph.

Yet this is the point:
a photograph leaves out living
For Eton crops, old blazers, baptismal lace or
Some late-Victorian smile turned stiff and waxy,
All arabesques, but never the heart of the thing,
Which is neither good nor bad, but one maze of motion
Through which we dance, into and out of the darkness
To tireless music: motes in the curled winds' breathing
And more than motes, faced with the corners of choice.
And so at night below all the brilliant clusters
Of lamps in the sky, the living, dead and dying
Poised in their dance, I cling to the crust here stolidly
And pray for a perfect day.
Out in the cold
Of hoarfrost and starlight, we fear for tomorrow's choosing
And cherish dreams made in meticulous patterns;
But come tomorrow, we will neither be Christ nor Gandhi
But will breathe this polluted air and rejoice with the birds.

All that I ask is that myriad lights, ever changing,
Continue to play on this great rind of ranges and valleys,
Flooding the vision of dreaming dwellers in cities
Who walk out in summer pursuing something to praise.
We will neither be simple nor clear till the end of our days.

That Summer

A dark season lurked
In the middle of that summer;
I laboured with the pen
And pencil, axe and hammer.

While chopping on the slope,
I cracked a small log open
And saw a glossy cricket
Squat on the wood, unshaken;

At first he would not budge:
When I came back he had gone,
Had crawled off into the grass,
And summer's heat came on.

That Last Summer at Eaglemont

In the beginning it was much to do with light
Feeling at brushtip the afternoon's full glare,
Pale paddocks and streaky stalks of grass
Crushed only where an easel had briefly stood
Or K had conned some girl...no names no packdrill.
One side of the picture, as you might say, was
Bulldog's initiative, his poetry of labour
Leading him on to rigorous Inverell,
Muscle and whipcord; but the other side
Was far away from bushranging as — Herriek, say;
Sunset pink, a flutter of locals at tennis, a hammock
Under planted pines, beer from the Old England,
Time snoozing in an amber tilted glass.
Still glides the Yarra, would forever glide, yes,
Till thinking of the doom-corrupted Conder
Yeats could write, after us the Savage God.

Sacred Ridges above Diamond Creek

for Les Murray

I want to make some kind of gesture of alien response,
response no longer alien, response finding its feet,
salute with my feet and my hands and heart to the totem beasts,
by whose names this district was patched and pieced like a tartan,
to echidna, formed like a child's drawing of an explosion,
to dingo, long driven away by Mr Fox in his red hunting coat,
to platypus, the shy, the watery secretive,
to magpie, sweetest yelp of the morning,
to sober-suited shrike-thrush, epitome of musical variation,
dour tortoise like a stone
and vibrant kingfisher smart as paint.

These are thinskin sandstone hill-rows
remaining shaggy with yellow box and stringybark
despite their undercoat of heedless houses,
and the gutters still gush to tanglethroated creeks
so I pay my spilt tribute to all those neglected totems,
to clever-tailed possum with his unspeakable voice,
to willy wagtail in flight, a whole symbolic system,
to kangaroo, whose name at least we dared to retain here,
to square koala, cosily hunched no longer in manna gum forks along Main

Road,

to black bream and snake
to kookaburra, raucous herald of fire's daily return,
to the wild cat, whom I do not know,
to the 'furred and curious wombat',
to you all, primal kin of the region I choose to live in,
each genius loci now displaced by incomprehensible names and grids
though the cunning birds, secularized, remain,

I yield you primacy now,

you and those adamic makers who prowled around these scrabble-shingled hills
before me,

whom we may choose to ignore at our own cost,
hail and farewell, but then, after all, hail.

Yours is the first magic.

Yours are the names of things.

I cannot divest myself of this curious tongue
but I lay down my arms.

Meditation with Memories

All over the world things are going on at once,
Space—time collapses, the caravels inch west,
I am a boy again reading strange headlines,
ELEPHANTS TRIUMPH: HANNIBAL CROSSES ALPS,
The alphabet is invented, the printing press,
I move to another school,
Doomed soldiers run through dust toward the Turks
And Billy Hughes is ravaging Versailles.

Evening star,
Hungry Vesper,
You punctured a gloaming sky,
Steady against the motion
Of our dark southwarding carriages,
Solemnly, brilliantly, there
At my right hand.

What is our memory that it deposits
In such uncobbled alleys of the mind
In charges or solutions fond events,
Honey against the winter coming on?
Random and miniature its family-album,
Brilliant the slides but dim the prophecy
That schema of lost action have to offer:
Memory hugs the heat against itself.

Evening star,
You swayed along beside us
Mile after mile
Along the dry sierras
And westward villages foundering into night,
Clean profile,
Sparse terrain,
The miles that travellers devour
In a gust of physical hunger
To quest and to arrive
Anxiously, ardently, soon,
In rough towns waiting for new selves,
Waiting to shape our ways,
The outlines of a future we prepare.

An Autumnal

When I come back to this garden after my death,
will the black walnut tree have been cut down,
the brick-and-galvo studio made over into flats
reflecting what will have happened all over town?

I wonder just what my airy after-self will find
that the present me could even recognise
roughly, as being something we lived amid;
what will confront my hypothetical eyes

and spiritual vision? Will the bluestone paving
be there, tangling vines and archaic ginkgo tree?
I wonder how my grandkids' generation
will be getting along: at all familiarly?

If a posthumous person can view things with horror,
will my airy unself shrink back from the tacky way
fashion can rot the linework of certitude,
making more of a mess from townscape every day?

Will the blackbird's descendant still be pecking, though,
at our patchy lawn? Parrots will squeal overhead,
I'm sure. The hedge may still murmur hints of us
or the corrugated tanks. But I'll be dead.

Going to Sleep

NOW switchfall darkness drenches all the room;
Entanglements of line and form are swept
Out of your ken; well-fingered shapes become
The one broad shape of night
And who can tell what sullen rules are kept?

Out there, beyond the cot-bars, what remains?
Wallpaper, rough towels, wooden toys,
Forbidden cupboards and a shattered train —
All these are sunken deep;
No vase can fall, no being makes a noise.

The bars that you can feel enclose a world,
The circumscribed dominion of King Touch.
As blind as Oedipus and strangely cold
You grip your blanket, hear
Far trams, a muffled radio: not much.

A father and a mother drift away.
Tossed on the flux, their independent boats
Eddy and swirl beyond Port Phillip Bay,
Enter the open sea;
Cupped in the blue god's hand their marriage floats.

Withdraw into your blanket. Shut your eyes.
Feckless imagination flirts with death
And must be drowned. Relax and realize
That sun will lick your panes
And white clouds blossom on your morning breath.

Do I Sleep or Am I Slept?

At morning there came the dream that includes all dreams,
its detail unclear, but mastery quite profound;
with no visible characters
it owned all the pigeonholes:
the future was eaten away.

Perhaps it was the Word.
Needing no breath of syntax it reached out,
imposing domination on the first
half of my ordinary Sunday.

Clearly it had prejudged
parking spot, dates, tennis booking, proper names
just when that bill was due.
Design! Design!

On top of my questions, the answer lay
like an old cat.

Celestial timber, silent joinery,
the universe had been fitted out with shelves
on my behalf.

RANDOLPH STOW

1935 – 2010

Julian Randolph Stow (28 November 1935 – 29 May 2010) was an Australian writer.

Born in Geraldton, Western Australia, Randolph Stow attended Guildford Grammar School and the University of Western Australia. He lectured in English Literature at the University of Adelaide, the University of Western Australia and the University of Leeds. He also worked on an Aboriginal mission as an anthropologist, used as background for *To the Islands*, and as a patrol officer in the Trobriand Islands, where he suffered a severe attack of malaria. He used this experience in *Visitants*.

For many years he lived in Suffolk in England, his ancestral county, and he used traditional tales from that area as the basis of *The Girl Green as Elderflower*; the last decades of his life he spent in nearby Harwich.

His novel *To the Islands* won the Miles Franklin Award in 1958. He was awarded the Patrick White Award in 1979. As well as producing fiction and poetry, he also wrote libretti for theatrical works by Peter Maxwell Davies.

Because he was a local writer of some standing, a considerable number of Randolph Stow's poems are listed in the State Library of Western Australia online catalogue with indications where they have been anthologised.

He died in England of liver cancer at the age of 74

The Land's Meaning

For Sidney Nolan

The love of man is a weed of the waste places,
One may think of it as the spinifex of dry souls.

I have not, it is true, made the trek to the difficult country
where it is said to grow; but signs come back,
reports come back, of continuing exploration
in that terrain. And certain of our young men,
who turned in despair from the bar, upsetting a glass,
and swore: "No more" (for the tin rooms stank of flyspray)
are sending word that the mastery of silence
alone is empire. What is God, they say,
but a man unwounded in his loneliness?

And the question (applauded, derided) falls like dust
on veranda and bar; and in pauses, when thinking ceases,
the footprints of the recently departed
march to the mind's horizons, and endure.

And often enough as we turn again, and laugh,
cloud, hide away the tracks with an acid word,
there is one or more gone past the door to stand
(wondering, debating) in the iron street,
and toss a coin, and pass, to the township's end,
where one-eyed 'Mat, eternal dealer in camels,
grins in his dusty yard like a split fruit.

But one who has returned, his eyes blurred maps
of landscapes still unmapped, gives this account:

"The third day, cockatoos dropped dead in the air.
Then the crows turned back, the camels knelt down and
stayed there,
and a skin-coloured surf of sandhills jumped the horizon
and swamped me. I was bushed for forty years.

"And I came to a bloke all alone like a kurrajong tree.
And I said to him: 'Mate - I don't need to know your name -
Let me camp in your shade, let me sleep, till the sun goes
down.'"

Landfall

And indeed I shall anchor, one day - some summer morning
of sunflowers and bougainvillea and arid wind-
and smoking a black cigar, one hand on the mast,
turn, and unlade my eyes of all their cargo;
and the parrot will speed from my shoulder, and white yachts
glide
welcoming out from the shore on the turquoise tide.

And when they ask me where I have been, I shall say
I do not remember.

And when they ask me what I have seen, I shall say
I remember nothing.

And if they should ever tempt me to speak again,
I shall smile, and refrain.

A Wind from the Sea

Wind that breaks across the bay
tumbles the grass in green and grey.

Lapped by grass, with posts alean,
the house patchpeels in grey and green.

High up in those blistered walls
a window lifts, some dimness falls.

Loosed into the weather, grey
tatters of lacework suck and splay.

Past those curtains lies a room.
Almond husks bear such grey bloom.

In that room some figure stands:
brushing a greyness from its hands.

Holding back the bellying lace.
Wind, salt wind, across its face.

My Wish for My Land

The Woman:

My wish for my land is that ladies be beautiful,
That horses be spirited and gentlemen courteous
And all moustaches faultless.

My wish for my husband is that he read Tennyson.
My wish for my daughter is that she be interesting
And capture a million acres.

My wish for my sons is that they be chivalrous,
Sun-tanned and tall, and that they bestow on me
Perhaps a dozen grandsons.

My wish for my house is that linen be Irish
And tableware sterling, and that the piano
Go never too long unplayed.

My wish for myself is that I grow matronly,
Straying in dove-grey silk through the roses
Under the far far harking of the crows.

The Enemy

As well, maybe, that you cannot read our minds;
There are worse tools than swords and rifle-butts.
My enemy: my passion. At dead of night,

Licking my wounds, I begin to think I love you.

Certainly none were ever so bound in love
As we are bound in hate: O my ideal.

One sight of you, and life grows meaningful.
One blow: new strength to every slave who watches;

One word: revived fidelity, fresh lust.
Time-weakness – absence – death can have no bearing.

You whom I serve, your prefect gentle knight,
Can you divine that longed-for consummation?
Lover: I mean to take you like a sponge,
And wring your blood out on Hiroshima.

LES MURRAY

b. 1938

"Religions are big slow poems, while most poems are short, fast religions." –
Les Murray

Leslie Allan Murray was born in 1938 at Nabiac, in the mid-north coast region of New South Wales, the only child of Cecil Murray and his wife Miriam (née Arnall), dairy farmers. The family lived in a primitive bush shack on land owned by Cecil Murray's domineering father, John Allan Murray, at Bunyah in the central coast hinterland. The harsh conditions of the poet's childhood years were offset by an early and lasting love for the rural woodland environment where he grew up; the Australian bush generally – and Bunyah specifically – would come to figure prominently as a setting and subject in his poetry. Murray's first schooling was through a correspondence school in Sydney, and from 1948–1950 he attended Bulby Brush Public School, followed by a brief period at boarding school at the start of 1951. But in April 1951, Murray's mother died after complications following an ectopic pregnancy, and this traumatic event dramatically altered the course of his life. He returned home from boarding school to look after his father, who was overcome by grief and unable to care for himself. Murray subsequently attended Nabiac Central School, leaving after completing ninth grade in 1953, after which he spent a solitary year at Bunyah, wandering in the bush and reading. In 1955–1956 he completed two further years of schooling as a boarder at Taree High. At Taree, Murray's keen intellect, corpulence, and lack of social graces made him the target of sustained bullying, an experience that deeply marked his psyche and was to have powerful reverberations in his writing. His first poems were written at the end of 1956, at Bunyah.

In 1957, Murray commenced an Arts degree at the University of Sydney on a Commonwealth scholarship. He had little time for lectures and coursework, but read voraciously, teaching himself a range of languages in the process. He also became friendly with other young writers, including the poet Geoffrey Lehmann, and became involved with the student publications *Arna*, *Hermes*, and *Honi Soit*, where some of his early poems were published. In 1961, two of Murray's poems were published in the literary journal *Southerly* (then edited by Kenneth Slessor). By this time, however, Murray had suffered a nervous breakdown, and in July 1961 dropped out of University and hitchhiked to Melbourne, subsequently travelling around Australia before returning to Sydney at the end of 1961. The following year he met Valerie Morelli, a fellow student, and the couple married in August 1962. In 1963 Murray took up a position as a translator at the library of the Australian National University in Canberra, drawing on his wide knowledge of European languages. He continued to write poetry, and was encouraged in his efforts by Canberra poets A. D. Hope and David Campbell. In 1965 Murray published his first book of poetry, a joint collection with Geoffrey Lehmann, *The Ilex Tree*. The work was an immediate critical success, and won the Grace Leven Prize for 1965.

In 1967 Murray resigned from his position at ANU and took his family to Europe, where they lived in Wales and Scotland, and the following year, supported by a Commonwealth Literary Fellowship, toured the continent. In 1969 he returned to the University of Sydney, completed the requirements for his Arts degree, and published his first sole-authored poetry collection, *The Weatherboard Cathedral*,

with Angus and Robertson. In 1970 his poem sequence “Seven Points for an Imperilled Star” won a lucrative competition organised as part of the celebrations for the Bicentenary of the Endeavour voyage, and he was awarded a six-month Commonwealth literary fund fellowship for 1971. After his fellowship finished, Murray struggled to find suitable employment, and he finally decided to attempt to earn his living as a full-time writer. The 1970s saw Murray’s emergence as a significant figure on the Australian literary scene: he published five volumes of verse, including *Lunch and Counter-Lunch* (1974), joint winner of the National Book Council Award for Australian Literature, his first volume of selected poems, *The Vernacular Republic* (1976), and a verse novel made up of 140 sonnets, *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980), winner of the Grace Leven Prize. In 1978, he published his first volume of selected prose, *The Peasant Mandarin: Prose Pieces*, comprising essays on Australian political and cultural topics, and a selection of his book reviews, written mainly for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. From 1973 until 1980, Murray was editor of *Poetry Australia*, in which capacity he was an important figure in the so-called ‘Poetry Wars’ of the 1970s, and from the late 1970s until 1990 he was poetry reader for publishers Angus and Robertson.

Already a major figure in Australian literary circles, from the early 1980s Murray began to attain a greater international profile. His revised volume of selected poems *The Vernacular Republic: Poems 1961–1981* was published by Persea Books in New York and Canongate Books in Edinburgh, as well as by Angus and Robertson in Sydney. In the same year he published a small volume of poems, *Equanimities*, with Razorback Press in Copenhagen. Murray’s prolific output of poetry continued in the 1980s, and despite his often fractious relationship with academic critics and some fellow writers, his work continued to garner critical acclaim. His collections *The People’s Otherworld* (1983), *The Daylight Moon* (1987), and *Dog Fox Field* (1990), won various poetry awards including the New South Wales Premier’s Award for poetry, the Australian Literary Society Gold Medal, the John Bray prize, and the Grace Leven prize. In 1989, his contribution to Australian literature was recognised with the award of an Order of Australia. In the mid-1980s, Murray and his family left Sydney to live at Bunyah, where they have continued to live ever since.

Murray suffered a nervous breakdown in the late 1980s, which, he has said, spiralled into chronic depression which lasted through much of the 1990s. In this period he was involved in a number of controversies, including a public dispute with the Literature Board of the Australia Council, with Murray and his supporters alleging political bias in the distribution of funds. Notwithstanding his depression and his involvement in public controversies, Murray continued to produce acclaimed volumes of poetry. His *Collected Poems* (1991) won the FAW Barbara Ramsden award, and his *Translations from the Natural World* (1992) won both the Kenneth Slessor prize and the C. J. Dennis prize. In 1996 Murray published perhaps his most celebrated collection, *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, which again won the C. J. Dennis prize as well as the prestigious international poetry prize the T. S. Eliot Award. Shortly after the publication of this work, Murray was hospitalised with a liver abscess, narrowly escaping death. On recovering, he wrote a second verse novel, the semi-autobiographical *Fredy Neptune* (1998), and published a volume of verse written in the aftermath of his illness, *Conscious and Verbal* (1999). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, he has continued to write and publish poetry, with his collections including *Poems the Size of Photographs* (2003), *Collected Poems 1961–2002* (2002; 2006) and *The Biplane Houses* (2006).

Les Murray has unquestionably been a major figure in contemporary Australian literature. Media reports since the 1980s have frequently referred to him as Australia's 'unofficial poet laureate', and since the 1990s he has been described as part of an international 'poetry superleague' of the best contemporary poets writing in English. Murray has attracted more international attention than any other Australian poet; he has been the recipient of prestigious international poetry prizes including the Petrarch Prize (1995), the T. S. Eliot Award (1997), and the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry (1998); collections of his work in translation have appeared in numerous languages including German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, and Hindi. In addition to his poetry, Murray has been prolific as an essayist and cultural critic since the 1980s, publishing further collections of prose including *Persistence in Folly* (1984), *Blocks and Tackles* (1990), *A Working Forest* (1997), and *The Quality of Sprawl: Thoughts about Australia* (1999). He has also edited a number of Australian poetry anthologies, and has served as literary editor for *Quadrant* (1989– present).

A committed nationalist and republican, Murray's writing has often championed what he defines as traditional Australian rural values, while stridently opposing perceived intellectual cliques and snobbery emanating from the cities, which he has associated for him with a kind of cultural imperialism. In an influential public literary debate with the poet Peter Porter, he has characterised this according to classical models as a Boetian-Athenian dichotomy, with Murray arguing that Australian poetry is – or should be – Boetian: that is, unadorned, traditional, and resistant to literary fashions, particularly those emanating from overseas. Murray's poems have often expressed his philosophical positions, exploring themes of modern urban alienation ('An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow'), the meditative qualities of bush life ('Evenings Alone at Bunyah'), the lives of ordinary rural Australians ('The Mitchells'), and individual suffering at the hands of intellectual orthodoxy ('For Helen Darville'). Much of his poetry, particularly his later work, has a strong autobiographical element (see, for example, 'The Steel'). Primarily a lyric poet, Murray has also written extensively in longer verse forms and sequences, his output in this area including his two verse novels, *The Idyll Wheel: Cycle of a Year at Bunyah, New South Wales, April 1986-April 1987*, and *The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle*, a long poem based on a translation of a traditional song of the Wonguri-Mandjiagai people of North-Eastern Arnhem Land.

Murray is ranked alongside Walcott, Heaney and Brodsky as one of the key voices in contemporary English-language poetry, and has been compared to Auden for his mastery of form and language, while Peter Porter claimed that he is no less than "the custodian of Australia's soul". Deeply attuned to the Australian vernacular and the lifeblood and rhythm of the rural world he evokes, Murray often riddles both humour and polemic through his work, critiquing the urban social worlds against which he positions himself defiantly as an outsider. With a deft ear for the demotic, Murray creates a rich, fecund music that follows the currents of human life as well as the broader natural world of which it is part.

Cumulus

Repeatedly out of grazed plateaux, the Dividing
Range assumes, soaring after gliding,
into high countries, not peaked but cumulus
in evergreen black and mossy bleached khaki
out under antarctic grey and razory blues,
horizons above the nation, now visited rarely
except in polemic hiking, or on the ski niveaux.
We turned away to ochre and surf sands long ago
and secret cattleyards never formed a traceable city.

White cloud still assembles daily along each island
far above our South Sea levels. Mist forest, tussock sops
under redoubled height drink fog along the Tops
and newly earthed rivers edge out of sphagnum overloads
to shin down human clay and unhuman cobbled roads
to the short east, to the brown west ocean of land;
the cello necks of tree ferns spread as they come uncurled
and screech-red parrots fly, with many stops,
toward the beech trees of the southern world.

On the varying heights where stupendous heights are brewed
out of clear air by pitch and altitude
few have yet lived, in all the centuries. Some have stayed.
Many themes attended the hibernation of Ned Kelly:
the fat moth-feast of the tribes, whip bird and rifle bird,
moleskin prospectors each working his vein of solitude;
Thunderbolt emerging from the wet cave of his treasure
sights a coach down through timber, spurs into ballad measure —
but these disappear down the crumples of the possum-skin rug,

the great ravines of catchment. Jindabygone, Adamemory.
Of Governors fleeing heat on the hill stations, we recall Jimmy,
but the sleepout in the dark ranges has weakened its tug
and retreat is continually modelled. Our plateau capital
avoids its own heights and nearby mountains. They are all
cloud-shadowed with new dry forest. The vixen feeds her cubs,
and kangaroos fold down to graze, above the human suburbs.
Neither fantasy nor fear has built an eagle's nest fortress
to top our nonfiction poetry. We've put the wild above us.

Once in a Lifetime, Snow

FOR CHRIS AND MARY SHARAH

Winters at home brought wind,
black frost and raw
grey rain in barbed-wire fields,
but never more

until the day my uncle
rose at dawn
and stepped outside — to find
his paddocks gone,

his cattle to their hocks
in ghostly ground
and unaccustomed light
for miles around.

And he stopped short, and gazed
lit from below,
and half his wrinkles vanished
murmuring *Snow*.

A man of farm and fact
he stared to see
the facts of weather raised
to a mystery

white on the world he knew
and all he owned.
Snow? Here? he mused. I see.
High time I learned.

Here, guessing what he meant
had much to do
with that black earth dread old men
are given to,

he stooped to break the sheer
crust with delight
at finding the cold unknown
so deeply bright,

at feeling it take his prints
so softly deep,
as if it thought he knew
enough to sleep,

or else so little he
might seek to shift
its weight of wintry light
by a single drift,

perceiving this much, he scuffed
his slippered feet
and scooped a handful up
to taste, and eat

in memory of the fact
that even he
might not have seen the end
of reality ...

Then, turning, he tiptoed in
to a bedroom, smiled,
and wakened a murmuring child
and another child.

The Edge of the Forest

The edge of the forest, hard smoke beyond the paddocks
frays back and is there. Cutters go out through it,
come in again on the ringbarked slopes, down the fence lines.

— *You have to send flooded gum quick. It don't stay flooded —*
ironbark's a bugger to bark if it comes dry weather —
the man sitting next to me knows inside the forest.

He has his praise out there. Two taps on a trunk
and he can tell you its life. Steering the chainsaw
he can drop a tree on a cigarette paper. His billets

bumped, loading, ring like gongs; they win prizes.
Tallowwood's lovely: it has a deep like fat.
He has raised trucks out of swamp with his quick chain-cunning.

He loves praise, hoards it. The tic's become hereditary.
His arts are the waltz, cards, company, ripostes:
Easy seen you're not two-faced. You wouldn't wear that one.

But at sixty-five, they take your life away.
If work has been shelter, they let in the winter
if work has been drudgery, night mocks the late-freed man
if work has been proof they take the glass away.

At four years old, he was milking easy cows
and was put to the plough at fourteen, the day after school.
Hauling timber with the teams, trusted in cattle dealing

he worked, then and always — long in lieu of pay —
for a sign of love from his irritable father,
the planter of flasks. His nightmare, strawed with praise.

The years hurry by. He was facing the bad birthday.
Neighbours talked heart. They tell you when to die
in a community. Thus when the Company, in person,

told him *Stay on: you're our best man*, some custom
and cliché were bent. It was a commutation.
Life. Life given back. Almost a father speaking.

He will come and go for years yet through the edge of the forest.

The Hanging Gardens

High on the Gloucester road
just before it wriggles its hips
level with eagles down the gorge
into the coastal hills

there were five beige pea-chickens
sloping under the farm fence
in a nervous unison of head-tufts
up to the garden where they lived

then along the gutter and bank
adult birds, grazing in full serpent.
Their colours are too saturate and cool
to see at first with dryland eyes

trained to drab and ginger. No one here
believes in green deeply enough. In greens
so blue, so malachite. Animal cobalt too
and arrow bustles, those are unparalleled.

The wail lingers, and their cane
surrection of iridium plaques. Great spirits,
Hindoostan in the palette of New Zealand!
They don't succeed at feral.

Things rush them from dry grass.
Haggard teeth climb to them. World birds,
human birds, flown by their own volition
they led us to palaces.

The Broad Bean Sermon

Beanstalks, in any breeze, are a slack church parade
without belief, saying *trespass against us* in unison,
recruits in mint Air Force dacron, with unbuttoned leaves.

Upright with water like men, square in stem-section
they grow to great lengths, drink rain, keel over all ways,
kink down and grow up afresh, with proffered new greenstuff.

Above the cat-and-mouse floor of a thin bean forest
snails hang rapt in their food, ants hurry through Escher's three worlds,
spiders tense and sag like little black flags in their cordage.

Going out to pick beans with the sun high as fence-tops, you find
plenty, and fetch them. An hour or a cloud later
you find shirtfulls more. At every hour of daylight

appear more that you missed: ripe, knobbly ones, fleshy-sided,
thin-straight, thin-crescent, frown-shaped, bird-shouldered, boat-keeled ones,
beans knuckled and single-bulged, minute green dolphins at suck,

beans upright like lecturing, outstretched like blessing fingers
in the incident light, and more still, oblique to your notice
that the noon glare or cloud-light or afternoon slants will uncover

till you ask yourself Could I have overlooked so many, or
do they form in an hour? unfolding into reality
like templates for subtly broad grins, like unique caught expressions,

like edible meanings, each sealed around with a string
and affixed to its moment, an unceasing colloquial assembly,
the portly, the stiff, and those lolling in pointed green slippers ...

Wondering who'll take the spare bagfulls, you grin with happiness
—it is your health—you vow to pick them all
even the last few, weeks off yet, misshapen as toes.

It Allows a Portrait in Line-Scan at Fifteen

He retains a slight 'Martian' accent, from the years of single phrases.
He no longer hugs to disarm. It is gradually allowing him affection.
It does not allow proportion. Distress is absolute, shrieking, and runs him at
frantic speed through crashing doors.
He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation.
It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing.
He can read about soils, populations and New Zealand. On neutral topics he's
illiterate.
Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn't a cyborg really, is he, Dad?
He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it continually.
He knows the map of Earth's fertile soils, and can draw it freehand.
He can only lie in a panicked shout *SorrySorryIdidn'tdoit!* Warding off conflict
with others and himself.
When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked
fruit.
His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile soil.
Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us how
autism resulted from 'refrigerator' parents.
When asked to smile, he photographs a rictus-smile on his face.
It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies.
If they (that is, he) are bad the police will put them in hospital.
He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces.
When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three times
adult speed.
Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then authorised
the rest.
Phrases spoken to him he would take as teaching, and repeat.
When he worshipped fruit, he screamed as if poisoned when it was fed to him.
A one-word first conversation: *Blane—Yes! Plane, that's right, baby!—Blane.*
He has forgotten nothing, and remembers the precise quality of experiences.
It requires rulings: *Is stealing very playing up, as bad as murder?*
He counts at a glance, not looking. And he has never been lost.
When he ate only nuts and dried fruit, words were for dire emergencies.
He knows all the breeds of fowls, and the counties of Ireland.
He'd begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence. It withdrew speech for
years.
Is that very autistic, to play video games in the day?
He is anger's mirror, and magnifies any near him, raging it down.
It still won't allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it.
He swam in the midwinter dam at night. It had no rules about cold.
He was terrified of thunder and finally cried as if in explanation
It—angry!
He grilled an egg he'd broken into bread. Exchanges of soil- knowledge are
called landtalking.
He lives in objectivity. I was sure Bell's palsy would leave my face only when
he said it had begun to.
Don't say word! when he was eight forbade the word 'autistic' in his presence.

Bantering questions about girlfriends cause a terrified look and blocked ears.

He sometimes centred the farm in a furrowed American Midwest.

Eye contact, Mum! means he truly wants attention. It dislikes I contact.

He is equitable and kind, and only ever a little jealous. It was a relief when that little arrived.

He surfs, bowls, walks for miles. For many years he hasn't trailed his left arm while running.

I gotta get smart! looking terrified into the years. *I gotta get smart!*

The Dream of Wearing Shorts Forever

To go home and wear shorts forever
in the enormous paddocks, in that warm climate,
adding a sweater when winter soaks the grass,

to camp out along the river bends
for good, wearing shorts, with a pocketknife,
a fishing line and matches,

or there where the hills are all down, below the plain,
to sit around in shorts at evening
on the plank verandah —

If the cardinal points of costume
are Robes, Tat, Rig and Scunge,
where are shorts in this compass?

They are never Robes
as other bareleg outfits have been:
the toga, the kilt, the lava-lava
the Mahatma's cotton dhoti;

archbishops and field marshals
at their ceremonies never wear shorts.
The very word
means underpants in North America.

Shorts can be Tat,
Land-Rovering bush-environmental tat,
socio-political ripped-and-metal-stapled tat,
solidarity-with-the-Third-World tat tvam asi,

likewise track-and-field shorts worn to parties
and the further humid, modelling negligée
of the Kingdom of Flaunt,
that unchallenged aristocracy.

More plainly climatic, shorts
are farmers' rig leathery with salt and bonemeal,
are sailors' and branch bankers' rig,
the crisp golfing style
of our youngest male National Costume.

Mostly loosely, they are Scunge,
ancient Bengal bloomers or moth-eaten hot pants
worn with a former shirt,
feet, beach sand, hair
and a paucity of signals.

Scunge, which is real negligée
housework in a swimsuit, pyjamas worn all day,
is holiday, is freedom from ambition.
Scunge makes you invisible
to the world and yourself.

The entropy of costume,
scunge can get you conquered by more vigorous cultures
and help you to notice it less.

Satisfied ambition, defeat, true unconcern,
the wish and the knack for self-forgetfulness
all fall within the scunge ambit
wearing board shorts or similar;
it is a kind of weightlessness.

Unlike public nakedness, which in Westerners
is deeply circumstantial, relaxed as exam time,
artless and equal as the corsetry of a hussar regiment,

shorts and their plain like
are an angelic nudity,
spirituality with pockets!
A double updraft as you drop from branch to pool!

Ideal for getting served last
in shops of the temperate zone
they are also ideal for going home, into space,
into time, to farm the mind's Sabine acres
for product or subsistence.

Now that everyone who yearned to wear long pants
has essentially achieved them,
long pants, which have themselves been underwear
repeatedly, and underground more than once,
it is time perhaps to cherish the culture of shorts,

to moderate grim vigour
with the knobble of bare knees,
to cool bareknuckle feet in inland water,
slapping flies with a book on solar wind
or a patient bare hand, beneath the cadjiput trees,

to be walking meditatively
among green timber, through the grassy forest
towards a calm sea
and looking across to more of that great island
and the further topics.

Tableau in January

January, noon. The idle length of a street ...
There is more light than world, and what few outlines
Persist forget their meaning in the heat.

The metal sea's too bright to walk upon.
Thoughts pass, and figment shops, and random glimmers
From crystals in the concrete, and oiled swimmers.
The sky does not exist when it's outshone.

On the dazed white sand, umbrellas stiffly lean
To pose and impose their shade upon the shifting
Languor of bodies and glare, and all the sifting
Motes of dim music mingled with the scene
Fade into summer, January, drifting ...

Things drift apart, significances fade.
The returning street, once blue, is taut with azure
Tension between persistence and erasure.
In the cool of doorways, shirts drink lemonade.

January, noon. The unreal, idle street.
There is more light than world. The poet, smiling,
Takes his soft lines and bends them till they meet.

Flood Plains on the Coast Facing Asia

Hitching blur to a caged propeller
with its motor racket swelling
barroom to barrage, our aluminium
airboat has crossed the black coffee
lagoon and swum out onto
one enormous crinkling green.
Now like a rocket loudening
to liftoff, it erects the earsplitting
wigwam we must travel in
everywhere here, and starts skimming
at speed on the never-never
meadows of the monsoon wetland.

Birds lift, scattering before us
over the primeval irrigation,
leaf-running jacanas, twin-boomed
with supplicant bare feet for tails;
knob-headed magpie geese
row into the air ahead of us;
waterlilies lean away, to go
under as we overrun them
and resurrect behind us.
We leave at most a darker green
trace on the universal glittering
and, waterproof in cream and blue,
waterlilies on their stems, circling.

Our shattering car
crossing exposed and seeping spaces
brings us to finely stinking places,
yet whatever riceless paddies
we reach, of whatever grass,
there is always sheeting spray
underhull for our passage;
and the Intermediate Egret leaps
alort out of stagnant colours
and many a double-barrelled crossbow
shoots vegetable breath emphatically
from the haunts of flaking buffalo;
water glinting everywhere, like ice,
we traverse speeds humans once reached
in such surroundings mainly
as soldiers, in the tropic wars.

At times, we fold our windtunnel
away, in its blackened steel sail
and sit, for talk and contemplation.

For instance, off the deadly islet,
a swamp-surrounded sandstone knoll
split, cabled, commissured
with fig trees' python roots.
Watched by distant plateau cliffs
stitched millennially in every crevice
with the bark-entubed dead
we do not go ashore.
Those hills are ancient stone gods
just beginning to be literature.

We release again the warring sound
of our peaceful tour, and go sledding
headlong through mounded paperbark
copses, on reaches of maroon
grit, our wake unravelling
over green curd where logs lie digesting
and over the breast-lifting deeps
of the file snake, whom the women here
tread on, scoop up, clamp head-first in their teeth
and jerk to death, then carry home as meat.

Loudest without speech, we shear
for miles on the paddock of nymphaeas
still hoisting up the paired pied geese,
their black goslings toddling below them.
We, a family with baby and two friends,
one swift metal skin above the food-chains,
the extensible wet life-chains of which
our civility and wake are one stretch,
the pelicans circling over us another
and the cat-napping peace of the secure,
of eagles, lions and two-year-old George
asleep beneath his pink linen hat as
we enter domains of flowering lotus.

In our propeller's stiffened silence
we stand up among scalloped leaves
that are flickering for hundreds of acres
on their deeper water. The lotus
prove a breezy nonhuman gathering
of this planet, with their olive-studded
rubbery cocktail glasses, loose carmine roses,
salmon buds like the five-fingertips-joined
gesture of summation, of *ecco!*
waist-high around us in all their greenery
on yeasty frog water. We receive this
sidelong, speaking our wiry language
in which so many others ghost and flicker.

We discuss Leichhardt's party and their qualities

when, hauling the year 1845
through here, with spearheads embedded in it,
their bullock drays reached and began skirting
this bar of literal water
after the desert months which had been
themselves a kind of swimming,
a salt undersea plodding, monster-haunted
with odd very pure surfacings.
We also receive, in drifts of calm
hushing, which fret the baby boy,
how the fuzzed gold innumerable cables
by which this garden hangs skyward
branch beneath the surface, like dreams.

The powerful dream of being harmless,
the many chains snapped and stretched hard for that:
both shimmer behind our run back
toward the escarpments where stallion-eyed
Lightning lives, who'd shiver all heights
down and make of the earth
one oozing, feeding peneplain.
Unprotected Lightning: there are his wild horses
and broilgas, and far heron not rising.
Suddenly we run over a crocodile.
On an unlilied deep, bare even
of minute water fern, it leaped out,
surged man-swift straight under us. We ran over it.
We circle back. Unhurt, it floats, peering
from each small eye turret, then annuls
buoyancy and merges subtly under,
swollen leathers becoming gargoyle stone,
chains of contour, with pineapple abdomen.

Two Rains

Our farm is in the patched blue overlap
between Queensland rain and Victorian rain
(and of two-faced droughts like a dustbowl tap).

The southerly rain is skimmed and curled
off the Roaring Forties' circuit of the world.
It is our chased Victorian silver

and makes wintry asphalt hurry on the spot
or pauses to a vague speed in the air,
whereas, lightning-brewed in a vast coral pot

the tropical weather disgorges its lot
in days of enveloping floodtime blast
towering and warm as a Papuan forest,

a rain you can sweat in, it steams in the sun
like a hard-ridden horse, while southern rain's absorbed
like a cool, fake-colloquial, drawn out lesson.

Shorelines

There is no place more vacant than this harmless
Wintry plain of marsh grass and grey farms
Stretching away cloud-darkened, dull with cold
Past where lone wind-pumps swivel iron arms,

Past where the river, dimmed with rotting soil
And static cloud, spreads wide amongst low islands,
Mosquito country, tea-tree mudbanks, reeds,
To reach the shoreless gleam out past all farmlands.

Watching slow birds out near the sky, our talk
Clings to this marsh-plain like the smoke of winter,
Drifts among weed-wrack, hovers in fenced fields.
A mile off, a barn stands open. Our words enter,

Probe and withdraw, being attracted always
Back to the reeds, the margins, the sky's shallows.
"Somewhere out there, down in the east, the sea . . ."
We picture the vast lake edged by crumbling billows.

Here are three kingdoms, earth and lake and sky
Meeting and mingling, softening at their edges,
The sky earth-grey, the fields absorbing salt-damp,
The river absorbing earth, sky-withered sedges:

We talk of many kingdoms meeting, merging,
The kingdom of legend bordering on Time,
All-crumbling shoreline, crossed both ways by horsemen,
Wanderers, ships, of the old realms of Dream

And their horizons, and what houses, peoples,
Mountains and moons lie out there, covered, drowned
For a season, then rise to fill the darkened heavens—
We stand on the flat shore, kicking sodden ground.

"I see this country diked and drained, grown fertile . . ."
"I see that too. And I see what follows."
Our slow words falter, being drawn back always
To the sere reeds, the islets, the sky's shallows.

"What is that like?" "Log huts replacing houses,
Men leached of philosophy, minds grown cruel and slack,
Language decayed to a devious singsong flatness,
Distinctions crumbling, ploughlands going back—"

"And when is this?" "When the present silts the future."
"You mean when reason stagnates in the mind . . ."

But what if that sleep should sometimes bring forth modes,
Not thought, not dream, but wholly new in kind?"

From upriver, two fishermen in a country boat
With chicken-wire nets and fruit tins, drift and row.
We walk on the wet shore. Horses, feeding, raise
Their heads from the rushy grass to watch us go

Thoughtfully through their dreaming vision, while
In talk and silence, we tap and probe the future
And the great past for legends, patterns, tales
In which to see, and move, and know our nature

And be complete, a world of balanced kingdoms
In each of us, and each in such a world.
As evening comes, horizons slowly harden.
Shallows are deepened. Farm buildings shrink with cold.

And, as the rising east wind dulls the water
And bends brusque reeds for the passage of the sky,
We, growing weary, trudge miles out to high ground
And strike the world-road, firm and fast and dry.

Lyrebird

Liar made of leaf-litter, quivering ribby in shim,
hen-sized under froufrou, chinks in a quiff display him
or her, dancing in mating time, or out. And in any order.
Tailed mimic aeon-sent to intrigue the next recorder,
I mew catbird, I saw crosscut, I howl she-dingo, I kink
forest hush distinct with bellbirds, warble magpie garble, link
cattlebell with kettle-boil; I rank ducks' cranky presidium
or simulate a triller like a rill mirrored lyrical to a rim.
I ring dim. I alter nothing. Real to real only I sing,
Gahn the crane to Gun the chainsaw, urban thing to being,
Screaming woman owl and human talk: eedieAi and uddyunnunoan.
The miming is all of I. Silent, they are a function
of wet forest, cometary lyrebirds. Their flight lifts them barely a semitone.

Equanimity

Nests of golden porridge shattered in the silky-oak trees,
cobs and crusts of it, their glory-box;
the jacarandas' open violet immensities
mirrored flat on the lawns,
weighted by sprinklers; birds, singly and in flocks
hopping over the suburb, eating, as birds do, in detail
and paying their peppercorns;
talk of 'the good life' tangles love with will

however; if we mention it, there is more to say:
the droughty light, for example, at telephone-wire
height above the carports, not the middle-ground
distilling news-photograph light of a smoggy Wednesday,
but that light of the north-west wind, hung on the sky
like the haze above cattleyards;

hungry mountain birds, too, drifting in for food, with the sound
of moist gullies about them, and the sound of the pinch-bar;
we must hear the profoundly unwished
garble of a neighbours' quarrel, and see repeatedly
the face we saw near the sportswear shop today
in which mouth-watering and tears couldn't be distinguished.

Fire-prone place-names apart
there is only love; there are no Arcadias.
Whatever its variants of meat-cuisine, worship, divorce,
human order has at heart
an equanimity. Quite different from inertia, it's a place
where the churchman's not defensive, the indignant aren't on the qui vive,
the loser has lost interest, the accountant is truant to remorse,
where the farmer has done enough struggling-to-survive
for one day, and the artist rests from theory —
where all are, in short, off the high comparative horse
of their identity.

Almost beneath notice, as attainable as gravity, it is
a continuous recovering moment. Pity the high madness
that misses it continually, ranging without rest between
assertion and unconsciousness,
the sort that makes Hell seem a height of evolution.
Through the peace beneath effort
(even within effort: quiet air between the bars of our attention)
comes unpurchased lifelong plenishment;
Christ spoke to people most often on this level
especially when they chattered about kingship and the Romans;
all holiness speaks from it.

From the otherworld of action and media, this

interleaved continuing plane is hard to focus:
we are looking into the light —
it makes some smile, some grimace.
More natural to look at the birds about the street, their life
that is greedy, pinched, courageous and prudential
as any on these bricked tree-mingled miles of settlement,
to watch the unceasing on-off
grace that attends their nearly every movement,
the same grace moveless in the shapes of trees
and complex in our selves and fellow walkers: we see it's indivisible
and scarcely willed. That it lights us from the incommensurable
we sometimes glimpse, from being trapped in the point
(bird minds and ours are so pointedly visual):
a field all foreground, and equally all background,
like a painting of equality. Of infinite detailed extent
like God's attention. Where nothing is diminished by perspective.

The Meaning of Existence

Everything except language
knows the meaning of existence.
Trees, planets, rivers, time
know nothing else. They express it
moment by moment as the universe.

Even this fool of a body
lives it in part, and would
have full dignity within it
but for the ignorant freedom
of my talking mind.

from Poems the Size of Photographs, 2002

If a Pebble Fall

The pebble that clattered
And tapped in its blindstick descent
Down the ledges and edges
Streaking down in and out of such spent
Crumbling infalls of day
As the echoing gorge still admitted
Came skidding at last to my feet
And stopped, uncommitted
To the cold rock water's
Final depth below
As if the man up on top
Who of all should best know
Had wanted to represent
With detached precision
The extent to which my
Dropping out of the world
Had been, despite all the talk,
My own decision
And with like restraint
The gravity and
Weight
Of my position.

The Tin Wash Dish

Lank poverty, dank poverty,
its pants wear through at fork and knee.
It warms its hands over burning shames,
refers to its fate as Them and He
and delights in things by their hard names:
rag and toejam, feed and paw —
don't guts that down, there ain't no more!
Dank poverty, rank poverty,
it hums with a grim fidelity
like wood-rot with a hint of orifice,
wet newspaper jammed in the gaps of artifice,
and disgusts us into fierce loyalty.
It's never the fault of those you love:
poverty comes down from above.

Let it dance chairs and smash the door,
it arises from all that went before
and every outsider's the enemy —
Jesus Christ turned this over with his stick
and knights and philosophers turned it back.
Rank poverty, lank poverty,
chafe in its crotch and sores in its hair,
still a window's clean if it's made of air,
not webby silver like a sleeve.
Watch out if this does well at school
and has to leave and longs to leave:
someone, sometime, will have to pay.
Shave with toilet soap, run to flesh,
astound the nation, rule the army,
still you wait for the day you'll be sent back
where books or toys on the floor are rubbish
and no one's allowed to come and play
because home calls itself a shack
and hot water crinkles in the tin wash dish.

The Idyll Wheel

**CYCLE OF A YEAR AT BUNYAH, NEW SOUTH WALES, APRIL 1986—
APRIL 1987**

Preface

An east-running valley where two hooded creeks make junction
and two snoring roads make a rainguttered cross of function:

there, each hamlet of house-and-sheds stands connected and alone
and the chimneys of old houses are square bottles cut from iron.

Gum forest is a solid blue cloud on the hills to the south
and bladygrass and chain rust round its every wheeltracked mouth.

Being back home there, where I am all my ages,
I wanted to trace a year through all its stages.

I would start after summer, to catch a subtly vernal effect
(April is also when I conceived the project).

At one poem per month, it would take a baker's dozen
to accommodate the stretch and overlap of season

into season, in any single year —
and to be real, the year had to be particular

since this wasn't to be a cyclic calendar
of miniature peasantry painted as for a proprietor.

No one can own all Bunyah. Names shouted over coal-oil lamps
cling to their paddocks. Bees and dingoes tax the cattlecamps.

As forefather Hesiod may have learned too, by this time,
things don't recur precisely, on the sacred earth: they rhyme.

To illuminate one year on that known ground
would also draw light from the many gone underground

with steel wedges and glass and the forty thousand days lost or
worked, daylight to dark, there between Forster and Gloucester.

So: as grass tips turn maroon in a further winter
I present how time revolved through the spiral of a year

average, says experience, in erosions and deposit of seeds.
I thank Rosalind Atkins, whose burin opens up further leads

into the heart of it, making the more exquisite lines —

and I thank Alec Bolton for a book that dresses ours to the nines.

April

Leaf Spring

The long-limbed hills recline high
in Disposals khaki boiled in tankwater
or barbed-wire-tattered navy wool.
A dust of oil blues the farther air.

Crotches of black shade timber
thicken, and walled sky insets;
friezes of the one tree are repeated
along ridgelines, and the gesture of the heights

continues beneath the valley floor,
outcrops stepping toward the roofed creeks'
greener underground forest, spacing
corrugated corn flats. Contour-line by contour

cattle walk the hills, in a casual-seeming
prison strung from buried violins.
Sparse houses sit unpacked for good, each
among sheds, in its wheeltracked star.

Hobnail and elastic-side, bare and cloven feet:
you can't know this landscape in shoes, or with ideas
like relevance. It is a haughty pastoral
bent fitfully to farming's fourteen-hour days.

Disked-up ground in unseasonable heat
burns purple, and the tracks of a foam-white
longed-for watersnake are brown down every incline.
Season of smoke and parrots pecking the road,

half-naturalized autumn. Fruit is almost done
though few deciduous imports have yet decided;
no rain, and the slow tanks fill with dew;
nothing flowering, yet colour is abundant:

it is leaf spring, that comes on after heat.
The paperbark trees that suck on swampy clay
are magnified in skims of leek and sherry.
Though growth's gone out of grass, and cattle nose

green from underneath its tawny pelt,
the creek trees cluster, showered with pale expansion
from inside themselves, as if from dreams of rain;
heightening gum trees are tipped bronze and citrine

and grey-barked apple trees are misted round
with rosy blue — the aged angophora trees
that sprout from every live part of themselves
and drop their heavy death along the ground

on just such a still day here
as shade broadens south of everything
and fugitive whisky-bottle blink
and windscreen glance point the paddock air.

May

When Bounty is down to Persimmons and Lemons

In May, Mary's month,
when snakes go to sleep,
sunlight and shade lengthen,
forest grows deep,

wood coughs at the axe
and splinters hurt worse,
barbed wire pulls through
every post in reverse,

old horses grow shaggy
and flies hunker down
on curtains, like sequins
on a dead girl's ball gown.

Grey soldier-birds arrive
in flickers of speed
to hang upside down
from a quivering weed

or tremble trees' foliage
that they trickle down through.
Women's Weekly summer fashions
in the compost turn blue.

The sun slants in under things
and stares right through houses;
soon pyjamas will peep, though,
from the bottoms of trousers.

Night-barking dogs quieten
as overcast forms
and it rains, with far thunder,
in queer predawn storms;

then the school bus tops ridges
with clay marks for effort,

picking up drowsy schoolkids,
none of them now barefoot,

and farmers take spanners
to the balers, gang ploughs
and towering diesel tractors
they prefer to their cows.

June

The Kitchens

*This deep in the year; in the frosts of then
that steeled sheets left ghostly on the stayed line,
smoked over verandah beds, cruelled water taps rigid,
family and visitors would sit beside the lake
of blinding coals, that end of the detached kitchen,
the older fellows quoting qoph and resh
from the Book of Psalms, as they sizzled phlegm
(some still did it after iron stoves came
and the young moved off to cards and the radio)
and all told stories. That's a kind of spoken video:*

We rode through from the Myall
on that road of the cedarcutter's ghost.
All this was called Wild Horses Creek then;
you could plait the grass over the pommel
of your saddle. That grass don't grow now.
I remember we camped on Waterloo that night
there where the black men gave the troopers a hiding.

The garden was all she had: the parrots were at it
and she came out and said to them, quite serious
like as if to reasonable people They are my peas.
And do you know? They flew off and never come back.

If you missed anything: plough,
saddle, cornplanter, shovel,
you just went across to Uncle Bob's
and brought it home. If he
was there, he never looked ashamed:
he'd just tell you a joke,
some lies, sing you a poem,
keep you there drinking all night —

Bloody cruel mongrels, telling me the native bear
would grow a new hide if you skun it alive.
Everybody knows that, they told me. I told them
if I caught any man skinning bears alive
on my place, he'd bloody need a new hide himself.

Tommy Turpin the blackfellow said to me More better
you walk behind me today, eh boss.

Might be devil-devil tell me hit you with the axe
longa back of the head. I thought he was joking
then I saw he wasn't. My word I stayed behind
that day, with the axe, trimming tongues on the rails
while he cut mortises out of the posts. I listened.

I wis eight year old, an Faither gied me the lang gun
tae gang doon an shuit the native hens at wis aitin
aa oor oats. I reasoned gin ye pit ae chairge
i the gun, pouder waddin an shot, ye got ae shot
sae pit in twa, ye'd get twa. Aweel, I pit in seven,
liggd doon ahint a stump, pu'd the trigger — an the warld
gaed milky white. I think I visited Scotland
whaur I had never been. It was a ferlie I wis seean.
It wis a sonsy place. But Grannie gard me gang back.
Mither wis skailan watter on ma heid, greetin. Aa they found
o the gun wis stump-flinders, but there wis a black scour thro the oats,
an unco ringan in ma ears, an fifteen deid native hens.

Of course long tongue she laughed about that other
and they pumped her about you can guess and hanging round there
and she said He's got one on him like a horse, Mama,
and I like it. Well! And all because of you know —

Father couldn't stand meanness.
When Uncle you-know-who
charged money for milking our cows
that time Isabel took bad
Father called him gutless,
not just tin-arsed, but gutless.
Meanness is for cowards, Father reckoned.

The little devil, he says to the minister's wife
Daddy reckons we can't have any more children,
we need the milk for the pigs. Dear I was mortified —

Poor Auntie Mary was dying Old and frail
all scroopered down in the bedclothes pale as cotton
even her hardworking old hands Oh it was sad
people in the room her big daughters performing
rattling the bedknobs There is a white angel
in the room says Mary in this weird voice And then
NO! she heaves herself up Bloody no! Be quiet!
she coughed and spat Phoo! I'll be damned if I'll die!
She's back making bread next week Lived ten more years.

Well, it was black Navy rum; it buggered Darcy.
Fell off his horse, crawled under the cemetery fence.
Then some yahoos cantered past Yez all asleep in there?

All but me, croaks Darcy. They off at a hand gallop,
squealing out, and his horse behind them, stirrups belting it.

The worst ghost I ever saw
was a policeman and (one of the squatters)
moving cattle at night.
I caught them in my headlights.
It haunted me. Every time
I went in to town after that
somehow I'd get arrested —

I'll swear snakes have got no brains!
The carpet snake we had in the rafters
to eat rats, one day it et a chook.
I killed it with the pitchfork, ran a tine
through the top of its head, and chucked it
down the gully. It was back in a week
with a scab on its head and another under its chin.
They bring a house good luck but they got no brain.

Then someone might cup his hand short of the tongue
of a taut violin, try each string to be wrung
by the bow, that spanned razor of holy white hair
and launch all but his earthly weight into an air
that breathed up hearth fires strung worldwide between
the rung hills of being and the pearled hills of been.
In the language beyond speaking they'd sum the grim law,
speed it to a daedaly and foot it to a draw,
the tones of their scale five gnarled fingers wide
and what sang were all angles between love and pride.

July

Midwinter Haircut

Now the world has stopped. Dead middle of the year.
Cloud all the colours of a worn-out dairy bucket
freeze-frames the whole sky. The only sun is down
intensely deep in the dam's bewhiskered mirror
and the white-faced heron hides in the drain with her spear.

Now the world has stopped, doors could be left open.
Only one fly came awake to the kitchen heater
this breakfast time, and supped on a rice bubble sluggishly.
No more will come inside out of the frost-crimped grass now.
Crime, too, sits in faraway cars. Phone lines drop at the horizon.

Now the world has stopped, what do we feel like doing?
The district's former haircutter, from the time before barbers, has shaved
and wants a haircut. So do I. No longer the munching hand clippers
with locks in their gears, nor the scissors more pointed than a beak

but the buzzing electric clipper, straight from its cardboard giftbox.

We'll sit under that on the broad-bottomed stool that was
the seat for fifty years of the district's only sit-down job,
the postmistress-telephonist's seat, where our poor great-aunt
who trundled and spoke in sour verdicts sat to hand-crank
the tingling exchange, plugged us into each other's lives

and tapped consolation from gossip's cells as they unlidded.
From her shrewd kind successor who never tapped in, and planes
along below the eaves of our heads, we'll hear a tapestry
of weddings funerals surgeries, and after our sittings
be given a jar of pickle. Hers won't be like the house

a mile down the creek, where cards are cut and shuffled
in the middle of the day, and mortarbombs of beer
detonate the digestion, and they tell world-stopping yarns
like: I went to Sydney races. There along the rails,
all snap brims and cold eyes, flanked by senior police

and other, stony men with their eyes in a single crease
stood the entire Government of New South Wales
watching Darby ply the whip, all for show, over this fast colt.
It was young and naïve. It was heading for the post in a bolt
while the filly carrying his and all the inside money

strained to come level. Too quick for the stewards to note him
Darby slipped the colt a low lash to the scrotum.
It checked, shocked, stumbled — and the filly flashed by.
As he came from weighing in, I caught Darby's eye
and he said *Get out of it, mug*, quite conversationally. —

August

Forty Acre Ethno

The Easter rains are late this year
at this other end of a dry hard winter.
Low clouds grow great rustling crops of fall
and all the gully-courses braid and bubble,
their root-braced jugs and coarse lips pour
and it's black slog for cows when, grass lake to puddle,
a galloping dog sparks on all four.
It'll be plashy England here for a while
or boggy Scotland, by the bent straw colour
and the breaks of sun mirror-backed with chill.

Coming home? It was right. And it was time.
I had been twenty-nine years away
after books and work and society
but society vanished into ideology

and by then I could bring the other two home.
We haven't been out at night since we came
back, except last month, in the United Kingdom.
The towns ranged like footlights up the highway
and coastline here rehearse a subtle play
that's only staged in private by each family.

Sight and life restored by an eye operation
my father sits nightly before the glass screen
of a wood-burning slow combustion stove. We see
the same show, with words, on television.
Dad speaks of memories, and calls his fire homely:
when did you last hear that word without scorn
for something unglossy, or some poor woman?
Here, where thin is poor, and fat is condition,
'homely' is praise and warmth, spoken gratefully.
Its opposite lurks outside in dark blowing rain.

Horses are exposed to it, wanly stamping out
unglazed birth ware for mosquitoes in the coming season
and already peach trees are a bare wet frame
for notional little girls in pink dots of gingham.
Cars coming home fishtail and harrow the last mile,
their undersea headlights kicking gum trees around eerily;
woodducks wake high in those trees, and peer from the door
they'll shove their ducklings out of, to spin down in their down,
sprawl, and swim to water. Our children dog the foot-steps
of their grandfather, learning their ancient culture.

September

Mercurial

Preindustrial haze. The white sky rim
forecasts a hot summer. Burning days
indeed are rehearsed, with flies and dinnertime fan,
but die out, over west mountains
erased with azure, into spring-cool nights
and the first flying insects
which are the small weeds of a bedroom window.

Early in the month, the valley was a Friesian cow:
knobbed black, whitened straw.
Alarming smokes bellied up behind the heights of forest.
Now green has invested fires'
fixed cloud-shadows; lower gum boughs are seared chestnut.
Emerald kingparrots, crimson-breasted, whirr
and plane out of open feed sheds.

Winds are changeable. We're tacking.
West on rubbed blue days,

easterlies on hot, southerly and dead calm for rain.
Mercury is near the moon, Venus at perigee
and frogs wind their watches all night on swampy stretches
where waterhens blink with their tails at dusk, like rabbits
and the mother duck does her cripple act.

Dams glitter like house roofs again.
The first wasp comes looking for a spider to paralyse:
a flimsy ultralight flier
who looks like a pushover, but after one pass lifts
you, numb, out of your trampoline. Leaves together
as for prayer or diving, bean plants erupt
into the grazing glory. Those unnibbled spread their arms.

Poddy calves wobbling in their newborn mushroom colours
ingest and make the pungent custard of infancy.
Sign of a good year, many snakes lie flattened
on the roads again. Bees and pollens drift
through greening orchards. And next day it pours rain:
smokes of cloud on every bushland slope,
that opposite, wintry haze. The month goes out facing backwards.

October

Freshwater and Salt

It's the opening of the surf season
thirty miles away east;
most things speak a different dialect
over there on the coast.

Here, the rising wave comes as
grass. The animals drink it
thirstily. It's a sweetwater ocean.
If your house is fenced in, it'll sink it.

Fire and snakes swim in it;
you have to slash and mow.
Time for rotary blades, and weeping salt water
with your whole skin as you make them go.

It isn't in fact such a whelming
tide. But it's an ever-swelling one
you have to keep in balance, like the Dutch.
Much worse when it doesn't run.

Between us and the saltwater breakers
there's that rind, too, of chip-frying city
twelve thousand miles long, that locals
will come home from soon with gritty

trunksful and running shoes full
of ground bottle, ground coral, ground shell.
I guess we're all flesh of that shell
and will broach it by New Year, and wade gingerly

up to our nacles in salt swirl,
even we freshwater pearlers
and privately pale herbage hurlers
happiest on the grassed forms of groundswell.

November

The Misery Cord

IN MEMORY OF F.S. MURRAY

Misericord. The Misery Cord.

It was lettered on a wall.

I knew that cord, how it's tough to break
however hard you haul.

My cousin sharefarmed, and so got half:
half dignity, half hope, half income,
for his full work. To get a place
of his own took his whole lifetime.

Some pluck the misery chord from habit
or for luck, however they feel,
some to deceive, and some for the tune —
but sometimes it's real.

Milking bails, flannel shirts, fried breakfasts,
these were our element,
and doubling on horses, and shouting Score!
at a dog yelping on a hot scent —

but an ambulance racing on our back road
is bad news for us all:
the house of community is about
to lose a plank from its wall.

Grief is nothing you can do, but do,
worst work for least reward,
pulling your heart out through your eyes
with tugs of the misery cord.

I looked at my cousin's farm, where he'd just
built his family a house of their own,
and I looked down into Fred's next house,
its clay walls of bluish maroon.

Just one man has broken the misery cord

and lived. He said once was enough.
A poem is an afterlife on earth:
Christ grant us the other half.

December

Infant among Cattle

Young parents, up at dawn, working. Their first child can't
be his own babysitter, so as they machine the orphaned milk
from their cows, he must sit plump on the dairy cement,
the back of his keyhole pants safety-pinned to a stocking

that is tied to a bench leg. He studies a splotch of cream,
how the bubbles in it, too thick to break, work like
the coated and lucid gravels in the floor. On which he then dings
a steel thing, for the tingling in it and his fingers

till it skips beyond his tether. As the milkers front up
in their heel-less skiddy shoes, he hangs out aslant
on his static line, watching the breeching rope brace them
and their washed udders relieved of the bloodberry ticks

that pull off a stain, and show a calyx of kicking filaments.
By now the light stands up behind the trees like sheet iron.
It photographs the cowyard and dairy-and-bails in one vast
buttery shadow wheel on the trampled junction of paddocks

where the soil is itself a concrete, of dust and seedy stones
and manure crustings. When his father slings a bucketful
of wash water out the door, it wallops and skids
and is gulped down by a sudden maw like the cloth of a radio.

Out and on out, the earth tightens down on the earth
and squeezes heat up through the yellow grass
like a surfaceless fluid, to pool on open country,
to drip from faces, and breed the insect gleams of midday.

Under the bench, crooning this without words to his rag dog,
he hears a vague trotting outside increase — and the bull
erupts, aghast, through the doorway, dribbling, clay in his curls,
a slit orange tongue working in and out under his belly —

and is repulsed, with buckets and screams and a shovel.
The little boy, swept up in his parents' distress, howls then
but not in fear of the bull, who seemed a sad apparition:
a huge prostrate man, bewildered by a pitiless urgency.

January

Variations on a Measure of Burns

When January is home to visit her folks
and official work is a public hoax,
soy sprouts dotting the serpentine strokes
ploughs combed in the lacquered
hill soil that each afternoon's rainstorm soaks
weave a green jacquard

and zucchini and wart squash and Queensland Blues
(not the dog, but the pumpkin) squeak together like shoes
in tractor trailers, and nectarines bruise
from being awaited,
but the grizzled haze over mountain views
looks faintly methylated

because Drought, who's in on every forced sale,
thought he may have seen the farmers granted bail
this summer, has the continent in his entail.
Even smashed, he's seen you:
that old man up a back road fumbling his mail
gets letters from El Niño.

Disappointment, holiday and heatwave shilly-shally
round this snaky time of year. Stock prices plunge and rally
but the government's retreated for keeps from this valley:
the flash brick erstwhile
Whitlam toilet block lacks its school, and stands orphaned on its gully;
the PO's a closed file.

We retain a public phone and some dirt main roads
on whose corners part-time squatters tip sprawling loads
of gravel for drunk drivers who for lifetimes and by codes
like Whoa car! and hug-the-crown
miraculously get home to treat their families like toads
or finish upside down

in the dark, miles from town,
standing on my scalp with the rain's sparks falling upward,
windscreen a collective noun,
delighted by the spinning tyre slowing above the cupboard
and the glare-path through inverted trees — myself as I could
have been, through brutal labour for a bare livelihood,

myself on that quest
few families dare acknowledge, let alone go with you on,
the hunger for the Rest
when mortgage world time politics, everything's on top of one
and the teenage girl you married is not months but decades gone:
I'm sorry for myself in his sideburns and cardigan.

O he will like that,

murmurs his wife, wrestling farm accounts, steering above the rocks,
then bundling the children off to bed, switching off the box:
Television makes you fat!
Our concern cuts away at once. Moorhen and flying fox
outside creak identical rusty keys in their vocal locks
and the dark stands pat.

February

Feb

Seedy drytime Feb,
lightning between its teeth,
all its plants pot-bound.

Inside enamelled rims
dams shrink their mirroring shields,
baking the waterlilies.

Days stacked like clay pigeons
squeezed from dust and sweat.
Two cultures: sun and shade.

Days dazed with actuality
like a bottle shot
sniping fruit off twigs,

by afternoon, portentous
with whole cloud-Atlantics
that rain fifteen drops.

Beetroot and iron butter,
bread staled by the fan,
cold chook: that's lunch with Feb.

Weedy drymouth Feb, first cousin of scorched creek stones,
of barbed wire across gaunt gullies, bringer of soldered
death-freckles to the backs of farmers' hands. The mite-struck

foal rattles her itch on fence wires, like her mother,
and scraped hill pastures are grazed back to their charred
bulldozer stitchings. Dogs nip themselves under the tractor

of needy Feb, who waits for the raw eel-perfume
of the first real rain's pheromones, the magic rain-on-dust
sexual scent of Time itself, philtre of all native beings —

Lanky cornhusk Feb,
drilling the red-faced
battalions of tomatoes

through the grader's slots:
harvest out of bareness,
that semidesert mode.

Worn grasshopper month
suddenly void of children;
days tucking their tips in

with blackberry seeds to spit
and all of life root-bound;
stringy dryland Feb.

March

Masculene, Cried the Bulls

Bang! it was autumn,
right on the first of the month,
cool overcast after scorches
and next day it poured.

Four and a half inches
of rise in the dams, of wet in garden soil:
we know how long you were, rain,
four and a half deep inches.

As fresh green abolished
this summer's only white-blond month
the first autumnal scents
were ginger and belladonna

and as beds resumed their blankets
at the mope hour, bulls sang.
Among cattle, the more masculine
the higher the voice is pitched.

Our pumpkins took
first prize at Nabiac Show,
where a horse named Danielle
pirouetted, and posed on a tub,

and men raced through solid timber
backwards, with aimed steel strides,
and we met the Anglo-Nubian
tree-climbing goat, maker of,

and sheep of, the desert.
This was the weekend after clocks
jerked the sun an hour forward,
and all the time, leafage

of various winebottle colour
sprouted on the roses and lemon trees
and dew twinkled for longer
on the lengthening paddocks.

April

The Idyll Wheel

And so we've come right round the sun
to April again. It's unique again
like each month, each year. Much less of summer
reached April this year. Yet grass burgeoned after Easter.
Now fenced cultivations rug up, blue and tan
and old fruit trees declare themselves russet
along the creeks, or that dismantling brown
of cedars long ago spied from a mountain.

Into blue dimensionless as an ideal
with a Y-shaped prop, Mavis hoists the unreal
statures, flat and wet, of her whole family
for her glance and the warm sun to re-fill
above the pleats and hoed flickers of their hill
where Jack and her father move bent, keeping busy.
This isn't that year. But their names are there still
with Careys, Monks, Arnolds, the farms of surnames gone.

Here, roads have different names coming and going.
Over Bulby kinks one the Murrays rode along
into the hard-to-discern ruins of an idyll,
beige, drab with new bush, country emptied and unshaven.
On went Johnnie and Bella, east went Mina and Jimmy
whose family milked squatting so as not to get lazy,
Uncle Hughie, Aunt Grace — *us girls say Mrs Murray!* —
and years turned with handles were the first farming wheel.

This month, this year, Hiles' cattle mar the air
with saleyards' caked music. Before dinner, Charlie sang
The old folk had their reasons over the horizontal
queer hang of his guitar. Then we who say muttai
ate the last of this year's, boiled. Those who say corn
didn't all fly Macquarie Street dachas, though, here:
many are as poor as settlers ever were.
Now small frogs turn bronze. With the Post Office gone

nowhere's left for district people to meet by accident.
It has to be by knowledge. Ellen Harris, who taught me
to walk, Joyce new-widowed, and Vera and Norm
bail up cows, or watch milk suffuse the machine-glass
like a blizzarding idea. And I'm visible to them
on this wheel that was our Law, once. I haven't milked,

again, and it's sundown. They are the last to dairy.
Still, farmlets and cattle-spreads also live by touches,
a stump burning, dam scoopings, new wire stitches
and unstated idylls had driving to and from.

Cattle Ancestor

Darrambawli and all his wives, they came feeding from the south east back in that first time. Darrambawli is a big red fellow, terrible fierce. He scrapes up dust, singing, whirling his bullroarers in the air: he swings them and they sing out Crack! Crack! All the time he's mounting his women, all the time more *kulka*, more, more, smelling their *kulka* and looking down his nose. Kangaroo and emu mobs run from him, as he tears up their shelters, throwing the people in the air, stamping out their fires. Darrambawli gathers up his brothers, all making that sad cry *mar mar*: he initiates his brothers, the Bulluktruk. They walk head down in a line and make the big blue ranges. You hear their clinking noise in there. Darrambawli has wives everywhere, he has to gallop back and forth, mad for their *kulka*. You see him on the coast, and on the plains. They're eating up the country, so the animals come to spear them: You have to die now, you're starving us. But then Waark the crow tells Darrambawli Your wives, they're spearing them. He is screaming, frothing at the mouth, that's why his chest is all white nowadays. Jerking two knives, he screams *I make new waterholes! I bring the best song!* He makes war on all that mob, raging, dotting the whole country. He frightens the water-snakes; they run away, they can't sit down. The animals forget how to speak. There is only one song for a while. Darrambawli must sing it on his own.

The Conquest

Phillip was a kindly, rational man:
Friendship and Trust will win the natives, Sir.
Such was the deck the Governor walked upon.

One deck below, lieutenants hawked and spat.
One level lower, and dank nightmares grew.
Small floating Englands where our world began.

And what was trust when the harsh dead swarmed ashore
and warriors, trembling, watched the utterly strange
hard clouds, dawn beings, down there where time began,

so alien the eye could barely fix
blue parrot-figures wrecking the light with change,
man-shapes digging where no yam roots were?

The Governor proffers cloth and English words,
the tribesmen defy him in good Dhuruwal.
Marines stand firm, known warriors bite their beards.

Glass beads are scattered in that gulf of style
but pickpockets squeal, clubbed in imagination,
as naked Indians circle them like birds.

They won't Respond. They threaten us. Drive them off.
In genuine grief, the Governor turns away.
Blowflies form trinkets for a harsher grief.

As the sickness of the earth bites into flesh
trees moan like women, striplings collapse like trees —
fever of Portsmouth hulks, the Deptford cough.

It makes dogs furtive, what they find to eat
but the noonday forest will not feed white men.
Capture some Natives, quick. Much may be learned

indeed, on both Sides. Sir! And Phillip smiles.
Two live to tell the back lanes of his smile
and the food ships come, and the barracks rise as planned.

And once again the Governor goes around
with his Amity. The yeasts of reason work,
triangle screams confirm the widening ground.

No one records what month the first striped men
mounted a clawing child, then slit her throat
but the spear hits Phillip with a desperate sound.

The thoughtful savage with Athenian flanks
fades from the old books here. The sketchers draw
pipe-smoking cretins jigging on thin shanks

poor for the first time, learning the Crown Lands tune.
The age of unnoticed languages begins
and Phillip, recovering, gives a nodded thanks.

McEntire speared! My personal Huntsman, speared!
Ten Heads for this, and two alive to hang!
A brave lieutenant cools it, bid by bid,

to a decent six. The punitive squads march off
without result, but this quandong of wrath
ferments in slaughters for a hundred years.

They couldn't tell us how to farm their skin.
They camped with dogs in the rift glens of our mind
till their old men mumbled who the stars had been.

They had the noon trees' spiritual walk.
Pathetic with sores, they could be suddenly not,
the low horizon strangely concealing them.

A few still hunt way out beyond philosophy
where nothing is sacred till it is your flesh
and the leaves, the creeks shine through their poverty

or so we hope. We make our conquests, too.
The ruins at our feet are hard to see.
For all the generous Governor tried to do

the planet he had touched began to melt
though he used much Reason, and foreshadowed more

before he recoiled into his century.

The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle

1

The people are eating dinner in that country north of Legge's Lake;
behind flywire and venetians, in the dimmed cool, town people eat Lunch.
Plying knives and forks with a peek-in sound, with a tuck-in sound,
they are thinking about relatives and inventory, they are talking about customers
and visitors.

In the country of memorial iron, on the creek-facing hills there,
they are thinking about bean plants, and rings of tank water, of growing a
pumpkin by Christmas;
rolling a cigarette, they say thoughtfully Yes, and their companion nods,
considering.

Fresh sheets have been spread and tucked tight, childhood rooms have been
seen to,

for this is the season when children return with their children
to the place of Bingham's Ghost, of the Old Timber Wharf, of the Big Flood
That Time,
the country of the rationalized farms, of the day-and- night farms, and of the Pitt
Street farms,
of the Shire Engineer and many other rumours, of the tractor crankcase furred
with chaff,
the places of sitting down near ferns, the snake-fear places, the cattle-crossing-
long-ago places.

2

It is the season of the Long Narrow City; it has crossed the Myall, it has entered
the North Coast,

that big stunning snake; it is looped through the hills, burning all night there.
Hitching and flying on the downgrades, processionally balancing on the climbs,
it echoes in O'Sullivan's Gap, in the tight coats of the flooded-gum trees;
the tops of palms exclaim at it unmoved, there near Wootton.

Glowing all night behind the hills, with a north- shifting glare, burning behind
the hills;

through Coolongolook, through Wang Wauk, across the Wallamba,
the booming tarred pipe of the holiday slows and spurts again; Nabiac chokes in
glassy wind,
the forests on Kiwarraak dwindle in cheap light; Tuncurry and Forster swell like
cooking oil.

The waiting is buffed, in timber villages off the highway, the waiting is
buffeted:

the fumes of fun hanging above ferns; crime flashes in strange windcreens, in
the time of the Holiday.

Parasites weave quickly through the long gut that paddocks shine into;
powerful makes surging and pouncing: the police, collecting Revenue.

The heavy gut winds over the Manning, filling northward, digesting the towns,
feeding the towns;

they all become the narrow city, they join it;

girls walking close to murder discard, with excitement, their names.
Crossing Australia of the sports, the narrow city, bringing home the children.

3

It is good to come out after driving and walk on bare grass;
walking out, looking all around, relearning that country.
Looking out for snakes, and looking out for rabbits as well;
going into the shade of myrtles to try their cupped climate, swinging by one
hand around them,
in that country of the Holiday ...
stepping behind trees to the dam, as if you had a gun,
to that place of the Wood Duck,
to that place of the Wood Duck's Nest,
proving you can still do it; looking at the duck who hasn't seen you,
the mother duck who'd run Catch Me (broken wing) I'm Fatter (broken wing),
having hissed to her children.

4

The birds saw us wandering along.
Rosellas swept up crying out *we think we think*; they settled farther along;
knapping seeds off the grass, under dead trees where their eggs were, walking
around on their fingers,
flying on into the grass.
The heron lifted up his head and elbows; the magpie stepped aside a bit,
angling his chopsticks into pasture, turning things over in his head.
At the place of the Plough Handles, of the Apple Trees Bending Over, and of the
Cattlecamp,
there the vealers are feeding; they are loosely at work, facing everywhere.
They are always out there, and the forest is always on the hills;
around the sun are turning the wedgetail eagle and her mate, that dour
brushhook-faced family:
they settled on Deer's Hill away back when the sky was opened,
in the bull-oak trees way up there, the place of fur tufted in the grass, the place
of bone-turds.

5

The Fathers and the Great-grandfathers, they are out in the paddocks all the
time, they live out there,
at the place of the Rail Fence, of the Furrows Under Grass, at the place of the
Slab Chimney.
We tell them that clearing is complete, an outdated attitude, all over;
we preach without a sacrifice, and are ignored; flowering bushes grow dull to
our eyes.
We begin to go up on the ridge, talking together, looking at the kino-coloured
ants,
at the yard-wide sore of their nest, that kibbled peak, and the workers heaving
vast stalks up there,
the brisk compact workers; jointed soldiers pour out then, tense with acid;
several probe the mouth of a lost gin bottle;
Innuendo, we exclaim, *literal minds!* and go on up the ridge, announced by
finches;

passing the place of the Dingo Trap, and that farm hand it caught, and the place of the Cowbails,

we come to the road and watch heifers,

little unjoined Devons, their teats hidden in fur, and the cousin with his loose-slung stockwhip driving them.

We talk with him about rivers and the lakes; his polished horse is stepping nervously,

printing neat omegas in the gravel, flexing its skin to shake off flies;

his big sidestepping horse that has kept its stones; it recedes gradually, bearing him;

we murmur *stone-horse* and *devilry* to the gridders under grass.

6

Barbecue smoke is rising at Legge's Camp; it is steaming into the midday air, all around the lake shore, at the Broadwater, it is going up among the paperbark trees,

a heat-shimmer of sauces, rising from tripods and flat steel, at that place of the cone shells,

at that place of the Seagrass, and the tiny segmented things swarming in it, and of the Pelican.

Dogs are running around disjointedly; water escapes from their mouths,

confused emotions from their eyes; humans snarl at them Gwanout and

Hereboy, not varying their tone much;

the impoverished dog people, suddenly sitting down to nuzzle themselves;

toddlers side with them:

toddlers, running away purposefully at random, among cars, into big drownie water (come back, Cheryl-Ann!).

They rise up as charioteers, leaning back on the tow-bar; all their attributes bulge at once:

swapping swash shoulder-wings for the white-sheeted shoes that bear them,

they are skidding over the flat glitter, stiff with grace, for once not travelling to arrive.

From the high dunes over there, the rough blue distance, at length they come back behind the boats,

and behind the boats' noise, cartwheeling, or sitting down, into the lake's warm chair;

they wade ashore and eat with the families, putting off that uprightness, that assertion,

eating with the families who love equipment, and the freedom from equipment, with the fathers who love driving, and lighting a fire between stones.

7

Shapes of children were moving in the standing corn, in the child-labour districts;

coloured flashes of children, between the green and parching stalks, appearing and disappearing.

Some places, they are working, racking off each cob like a lever, tossing it on the heaps;

other places, they are children of child-age, there playing jungle:

in the tiger-striped shade, they are firing hoehandle machine-guns, taking cover behind fat pumpkins;

in other cases, it is Sunday and they are lovers.

They rise and walk together in the sibilance, finding single rows irksome, hating speech now,

or, full of speech, they swap files and follow defiles, disappearing and appearing;

near the rain-grey barns, and the children building cattleyards beside them;
the standing corn, gnawed by pouched and rodent mice; generations are moving among it,

the parrot-hacked, medicine-tasselled corn, ascending all the creek flats, the wire-fenced alluvials,

going up in patches through the hills, towards the Steep Country.

8

Forests and State Forests, all down off the steeper country; mosquitoes are always living in there:

they float about like dust motes and sink down, at the places of the Stinging Tree,

and of the Staghorn Fern; the males feed on plant-stem fluid, absorbing that watery ichor;

the females meter the air, feeling for the warm-blooded smell, needing blood for their eggs.

They find the dingo in his sleeping-place, they find his underbelly and his anus;
they find the possum's face, they drift up the ponderous pleats of the fig tree, way up into its rigging,

the high camp of the fruit bats; they feed on the membranes and ears of bats; tired wings cuff air at them;

their eggs burning inside them, they alight on the muzzles of cattle,
the half-wild bush cattle, there at the place of the Sleeper Dump, at the place of the Tallowwoods.

The males move about among growth tips; ingesting solutions, they crouch intently;

the females sing, needing blood to breed their young; their singing is in the scrub country;

their tune comes to the name-bearing humans, who dance to it and irritably grin at it.

9

The warriors are cutting timber with brash chainsaws; they are trimming hardwood pit-props and loading them;

Is that an order? they hoot at the peremptory lorry driver, who laughs; he is also a warrior.

They are driving long-nosed tractors, slashing pasture in the dinnertime sun;
they are fitting tappets and valves, the warriors, or giving finish to a surfboard.

Addressed on the beach by a pale man, they watch waves break and are reserved, refusing pleasantries;

they joke only with fellow warriors, chaffing about try-ons and the police, not slighting women.

Making Timber a word of power, Con-rod a word of power, Sense a word of power, the Regs. a word of power,

they know belt-fed from spring-fed; they speak of being *stiff*, and being *history*;
the warriors who have killed, and the warriors who eschewed killing,

the solemn, the drily spoken, the life peerage of endurance; drinking water from a tap,
they watch boys who think hard work a test, and boys who think it is not a test.

10

Now the ibis are flying in, hovering down on the wetlands,
on those swampy paddocks around Darawank, curving down in ragged dozens,
on the riverside flats along the Wang Wauk, on the Boolambayte pasture flats,
and away towards the sea, on the sand moors, at the place of the Jabiru Crane;
leaning out of their wings, they step down; they take out their implement at once,
out of its straw wrapping, and start work; they dab grasshopper and ground-cricket
with nonexistence ... spiking the ground and puncturing it ... they swallow down the outcry of a frog;
they discover titbits kept for them under cowmanure lids, small slow things.
Pronging the earth, they make little socket noises, their thoughtfulness jolting down and up suddenly;
there at Bunyah, along Firefly Creek, and up through Germany,
the ibis are all at work again, thin-necked ageing men towards evening; they are solemnly all back
at Minimbah, and on the Manning, in the rye-and- clover irrigation fields;
city storemen and accounts clerks point them out to their wives,
remembering things about themselves, and about the ibis.

11

Abandoned fruit trees, moss-tufted, spotted with dim lichen paints; the fruit trees of the Grandmothers,
they stand along the creekbanks, in the old home paddocks, where the houses were,
they are reached through bramble-grown front gates, they creak at dawn behind burnt skillions,
at Belbora, at Bucca Wauka, away in at Burrell Creek, at Telararee of the gold-sluices.
The trees are split and rotten-elbowed; they bear the old-fashioned summer fruits,
the annual bygoness: china pear, quince, persimmon;
the fruit has the taste of former lives, of sawdust and parlour song, the tang of Manners;
children bite it, recklessly,
at what will become for them the place of the Slab Wall, and of the Coal Oil Lamp,
the place of moss-grit and swallows' nests, the place of the Crockery.

12

Now the sun is an applegreen blindness through the swells, a white blast on the sea face, flaking and shoaling;
now it is burning off the mist; it is emptying the density of trees, it is spreading upriver,
hovering about the casuarina needles, there at Old Bar and Manning Point;
flooding the island farms, it abolishes the milkers' munching breath

as they walk towards the cowyards; it stings a bucket here, a teacup there.
 Morning steps into the world by ever more southerly gates; shadows weaken
 their north skew
 on Middle Brother, on Cape Hawke, on the dune scrub toward Seal Rocks;
 steadily the heat is coming on, the butter-water time, the clothes-sticking time;
 grass covers itself with straw; abandoned things are thronged with spirits;
 everywhere wood is still with strain; birds hiding down the creek galleries, and
 in the cockspur canes;
 the cicada is hanging up her sheets; she takes wing off her music-sheets.
 Cars pass with a rational zoom, panning quickly towards Wingham,
 through the thronged and glittering, the shale-topped ridges, and the
 cattle camps,
 towards Wingham for the cricket, the ball knocked hard in front of smoked-
 glass ranges, and for the drinking.
 In the time of heat, the time of flies around the mouth, the time of the west
 verandah;
 looking at that umbrage along the ranges, on the New England side;
 clouds begin assembling vaguely, a hot soiled heaviness on the sky, away there
 towards Gloucester;
 a swelling up of clouds, growing there above Mount George, and above
 Tipperary;
 far away and hot with light; sometimes a storm takes root there, and fills the
 heavens rapidly;
 darkening, boiling up and swaying on its stalks, pulling this way and that,
 blowing round by Krambach;
 coming white on Bulby, it drenches down on the paddocks, and on the wire
 fences;
 the paddocks are full of ghosts, and people in cornbag hoods approaching;
 lights are lit in the house; the storm veers mightily on its stem, above the roof;
 the hills uphold it;
 the stony hills guide its dissolution; gullies opening and crumbling down,
 wrenching tussocks and rolling them;
 the storm carries a greenish-grey bag; perhaps it will find hail and send it down,
 starring cars, flattening tomatoes,
 in the time of the Washaways, of the dead trunks braiding water, and of the
 Hailstone Yarns.

13

The stars of the holiday step out all over the sky.
 People look up at them, out of their caravan doors and their campsites;
 people look up from the farms, before going back; they gaze at their year's
 worth of stars.
 The Cross hangs head-downward, out there over Markwell;
 it turns upon the Still Place, the pivot of the Seasons, with one shoulder rising:
 'Now I'm beginning to rise, with my Pointers and my Load ...'
 hanging eastwards, it shines on the sawmills and the lakes, on the glasses of the
 Old People.
 Looking at the Cross, the galaxy is over our left shoulder, slung up highest in
 the east;
 there the Dog is following the Hunter; the Dog Star pulsing there above Forster;
 it shines down on the Bikies,

and on the boat-hire sheds, there at the place of the Oyster; the place of the
Shark's Eggs and her Hide;
the Pleiades are pinned up high on the darkness, away back above the Manning;
they are shining on the Two Blackbutt Trees, on the rotted river wharves, and on
the towns;
standing there, above the water and the lucerne flats, at the place of the
Families;
their light sprinkles down on Taree of the Lebanese shops, it mingles with the
streetlights and their glare.
People recover the starlight, hitching north,
travelling north beyond the seasons, into that country of the Communes, and of
the Banana:
the Flying Horse, the Rescued Girl, and the Bull, burning steadily above that
country.
Now the New Moon is low down in the west, that remote direction of the
Cattlemen,
and of the Saleyards, the place of steep clouds, and of the Rodeo;
the New Moon who has poured out her rain, the moon of the Planting-times.
People go outside and look at the stars, and at the melon-rind moon,
the Scorpion going down into the mountains, over there towards Waukivory,
sinking into the tree-line,
in the time of the Rockmelons, and of the Holiday ...
the Cross is rising on his elbow, above the glow of the horizon;
carrying a small star in his pocket, he reclines there brilliantly,
above the Alum Mountain, and the lakes threaded on the Myall River, and
above the Holiday.

Recourse to the Wilderness

FOR PETER BARDEN

Towards the end of the long Australian peace
when I was a twenty-two-year-old with failings,
ostentatious, untravelled, with a gift for dependence,
penury had grown stale; my childhood was in danger,
so I preceded you, in all but spirit,
to the Outside country
where the sealed roads end,
the far, still Centre.

Today, a sequence from that equivocal season
danced in my memory:
I saw myself away in South Australia,
still a novice, but learning,
having already felt frost through my blanket,
learned how to dig a hip-hole, to sleep quickly,
how to camp in good cover, especially in cities.
A month from home, barely,
and I'd even made a beginning
in the more advanced, more fruitful major subjects:
jettisoning weight, non-planning, avoidance of thought
in favour of landscape, stones and the travelling sky.

All that day, I had traversed the German country
— vast fields of September, distant adobe houses —
hungry, such was my mood, for the exotic,
I'd listened for German in casual talk overheard
in winecellar towns at peace with their horizons.

Now it was night. Damp furrows smelt of spring,
cool iron and thistle-stems. Far-off windows shone
approaching, receding. Cars dipped below the world's edge
on unknown roads.

And I walked on and on
upbraiding myself with melancholy pleasure
for past insufficiencies, future humiliations:
*You are always at fault. Nor will this ever change,
etcetera, etcetera.*

Later that night
the horror of Hell stared down at me for a great time,
silent, with horns,
till I reared awake, and found
myself bedded down on hay in a dawn-wet paddock
with twenty curious rams foregathered round me.

Under that augury, I hitchhiked on all that day
out of the fenced and fertile south-east districts
and, just on sundown, entered the waterless kingdom.

In the silent lands
time broadens into space.
Approaching Port Augusta, going on,
iron-brown and limitless, the plains
were before me all day. Burnt mountains fell behind
in the glittering sky.

At dawn, the sun would roll up from his lair
in the kiln-dry lake country, fire his heat straight through
the blind grey scrub, awaken me beside wheeltracks
and someone's car, and I would travel on.

At noon, far out in a mirage, I would brew
tea with strangers, yarn about jobs in the North
which I meant not to get
and, chewing quietly, watch maybe an upstart
dust-devil forming miles off, going high
to totter, darken
and, quite suddenly, vanish,
leaving a formless, thinning stain on the heavens.

Where the spirits of sea-cliffs
hovered on the plain
I would remember routines we had invented
for putting spine into shapeless days: the time
we passed at a crouching trot down Wynyard Concourse
telling each other in loud mock-Aranda and gestures
what game we were tracking down what haunted gorge,
frivolous games
but they sustained me like water,

they, and the is-ful ah!-nesses of things.

From Where We Live on Presence

A human is a comet streamed in language far down time; no other living is like it. Beetlehood itself was my expression.
It was said in fluted burnish, in jaw-tools, spanned running, lidded shields over an erectile rotor. With no lungs to huff hah! or selah!
few sixwalkers converse. Ants, admittedly, headlong flesh-mobbers, meeting, hinge back work-jaws, part their food-jaws, merge mouths in communion and taste their common being; any surplus is message and command.
Mine signal, in lone deposits; my capsule fourth life went by clues.
I mated once, escaped a spider, ate things cooked in wet fires of decay but for the most part, was. I could not have put myself better, with more lustre, than my presence did. I translate into segments, laminates, cachou eyes, pungent chemistry, cusps. But I remain the true word for me.

An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow

The word goes round Repins,
the murmur goes round Lorenzinis,
at Tattersalls, men look up from sheets of numbers,
the Stock Exchange scribblers forget the chalk in their hands
and men with bread in their pockets leave the Greek Club:
There's a fellow crying in Martin Place. They can't stop him.

The traffic in George Street is banked up for half a mile
and drained of motion. The crowds are edgy with talk
and more crowds come hurrying. Many run in the back streets
which minutes ago were busy main streets, pointing:
There's a fellow weeping down there. No one can stop him.

The man we surround, the man no one approaches
simply weeps, and does not cover it, weeps
not like a child, not like the wind, like a man
and does not declaim it, nor beat his breast, nor even
sob very loudly—yet the dignity of his weeping

holds us back from his space, the hollow he makes about him
in the midday light, in his pentagram of sorrow,
and uniforms back in the crowd who tried to seize him
stare out at him, and feel, with amazement, their minds
longing for tears as children for a rainbow.

Some will say, in the years to come, a halo
or force stood around him. There is no such thing.
Some will say they were shocked and would have stopped him
but they will not have been there. The fiercest manhood,
the toughest reserve, the slickest wit amongst us

trembles with silence, and burns with unexpected
judgements of peace. Some in the concourse scream
who thought themselves happy. Only the smallest children
and such as look out of Paradise come near him
and sit at his feet, with dogs and dusty pigeons.

Ridiculous, says a man near me, and stops
his mouth with his hands, as if it uttered vomit—
and I see a woman, shining, stretch her hand
and shake as she receives the gift of weeping;
as many as follow her also receive it

and many weep for sheer acceptance, and more
refuse to weep for fear of all acceptance,
but the weeping man, like the earth, requires nothing,
the man who weeps ignores us, and cries out

of his writhen face and ordinary body

not words, but grief, not messages, but sorrow,
hard as the earth, sheer, present as the sea—
and when he stops, he simply walks between us
mopping his face with the dignity of one
man who has wept, and now has finished weeping.

Evading believers, he hurries off down Pitt Street.

from The Weatherboard Cathedral, 1969

The Quality of Sprawl

Sprawl is the quality
of the man who cut down his Rolls-Royce
into a farm utility truck, and sprawl
is what the company lacked when it made repeated efforts
to buy the vehicle back and repair its image.

Sprawl is doing your farming by aeroplane, roughly,
or driving a hitchhiker that extra hundred miles home.
It is the rococo of being your own still centre.
It is never lighting cigars with ten-dollar notes:
that's idiot ostentation and murder of starving people.
Nor can it be bought with the ash of million-dollar deeds.

Sprawl lengthens the legs; it trains greyhounds on liver and beer.
Sprawl almost never says Why not? with palms comically raised
nor can it be dressed for, not even in running shoes worn
with mink and a nose ring. That is Society. That's Style.
Sprawl is more like the thirteenth banana in a dozen
or anyway the fourteenth.

Sprawl is Hank Stamper in Never Give an Inch
bisecting an obstructive official's desk with a chain saw.
Not harming the official. Sprawl is never brutal
though it's often intransigent. Sprawl is never Simon de Montfort
at a town-storming: Kill them all! God will know his own.
Knowing the man's name this was said to might be sprawl.

Sprawl occurs in art. The fifteenth to twenty-first
lines in a sonnet, for example. And in certain paintings;
I have sprawl enough to have forgotten which paintings.
Turner's glorious Burning of the Houses of Parliament
comes to mind, a doubling bannered triumph of sprawl—
except, he didn't fire them.

Sprawl gets up the nose of many kinds of people
(every kind that comes in kinds) whose futures don't include it.
Some decry it as criminal presumption, silken-robed Pope Alexander
dividing the new world between Spain and Portugal.
If he smiled in petto afterwards, perhaps the thing did have sprawl.

Sprawl is really classless, though. It's John Christopher Frederick Murray
asleep in his neighbours' best bed in spurs and oilskins
but not having thrown up:
sprawl is never Calum who, in the loud hallway of our house,
reinvented the Festoon. Rather
it's Beatrice Miles going twelve hundred ditto in a taxi,

No Lewd Advances, No Hitting Animals, No Speeding,
on the proceeds of her two-bob-a-sonnet Shakespeare readings.
An image of my country. And would that it were more so.

No, sprawl is full-gloss murals on a council-house wall.
Sprawl leans on things. It is loose-limbed in its mind.
Reprimanded and dismissed
it listens with a grin and one boot up on the rail
of possibility. It may have to leave the Earth.
Being roughly Christian, it scratches the other cheek
and thinks it unlikely. Though people have been shot for sprawl.

Mirror-Glass Skyscrapers

Jade suits pitched frameless up the sky
drift all day with sheer weather,
annexed cubes ascend and blend
at chisel points away high
on talc-green scintillant towers,

diurnal float-glass apparitions:
through their aspects airliners flow,
their decoration's anything that happens.
Even their height above suburb
is reflected. Perfect borrowers' rococo!

Outside, squared, has finally gone in,
closed over like steadying water,
to quote storms, to entertain strapped gondolas
and loose giants swimming in contour.
Inside yearning out isn't seen;

work's turned its back on sweat brilliantly —
but when they start to loom, these towers
disappear. Dusk's lightswitches reveal
yellow Business branching kilotall
and haloed with stellar geometry.

Machine Portraits with Pendant Spaceman

For Valerie

The bulldozer stands short as a boot on its heel-high ripple soles;
it has toecapped stumps aside all day, scuffed earth and trampled rocks
making a hobnailed dyke downstream of raw clay shoals.
Its work will hold water. The man who bounced high on the box
seat, exercising levers, would swear a full frontal orthodox
oath to that. First he shaved off the grizzled scrub
with that front-end safety razor supplied by the school of hard knocks
then he knuckled down and ground his irons properly; they copped many a
harsh rub.

At knock-off time, spilling thunder, he surfaced like a sub.

Speaking of razors, the workshop amazes with its strop,
its elapsing leather drive-belt angled to the slapstick flow
of fast work in the Chaplin age; tightened, it runs like syrup,
streams like a mill-sluice, fiddles like a glazed virtuoso.
With the straitlaced summary cut of Sam Brownes long ago
it is the last of the drawn lash and bullocking muscle
left in engineering. It's where the panther leaping, his swift shadow
and all such free images turned plastic. Here they dwindle, dense with oil,
like a skein between tough factory hands, pulley and diesel.

Shaking in slow low flight, with its span of many jets,
the combine seeder at nightfall swimming over flat land
is a style of machinery we'd imagined for the fictional planets:
in the high glassed cabin, above vapour-pencilling floodlights, a hand,
gloved against the cold, hunts along the medium-wave band
for company of Earth voices; it crosses speech garble music—
the Brandenburg Conch the Who the Illyrian High Command—
as seed wheat in the hoppers shakes down, being laced into the thick
night-dampening plains soil, and the stars waver out and stick.

Flags and a taut fence discipline the mountain pasture
where giant upturned mushrooms gape mildly at the sky
catching otherworld pollen. Poppy-smooth or waffle-ironed, each armature
distils wild and white sound. These, Earth's first antennae
tranquilly angled outwards, to a black, not a gold infinity,
swallow the millionfold numbers that print out as a risen
glorious Apollo. They speak control to satellites in high

bursts of algorithm. And some of them are tuned to win
answers to fair questions, viz. What is the Universe in?

How many metal-bra and trumpet-flaring film extravaganzas
underlie the progress of the space shuttle's Ground Transporter Vehicle
across macadam-surfaced Florida? Atop oncreeping house-high panzers,
towering drydock and ocean-liner decks, there perches a gridiron football
field in gradual motion; it is the god-platform; it sustains the bridal
skyscraper of liquid Cool, and the rockets borrowed from the Superman
and the bricked aeroplane of Bustout-and-return, all vertical,
conjoined and myth-huge, approaching the starred gantry where human
lightning will crack, extend, and vanish upwards from this caravan.

Gold-masked, the foetal warrior
unslipping on a flawless floor,
I backpack air; my life machine
breathes me head-Earthwards, speaks the Choctaw
of tech-talk that earths our discipline—

but the home world now seems outside-in;
I marvel that here background's so fore
and sheathe my arms in the unseen

a dream in images unrecalled
from any past takes me I soar
at the heart of fall on a drifting line

this is the nearest I have been
to oneness with the everted world
the unsinking leap the stone unfurled

In a derelict village picture show I will find a projector,
dust-matted, but with film in its drum magazines, and the lens
mysteriously clean. The film will be called *Insensate Violence*,
no plot, no characters, just shoot burn scream beg claw
bayonet trample brains—I will hit the reverse switch then, in conscience,
and the thing will run backwards, unlike its coeval the machine-gun;
blood will unspill, fighters lift and surge apart; horror will be undone
and I will come out to a large town, bright parrots round the saleyard pens
and my people's faces healed of a bitter sophistication.

The more I act, the stiller I become;
the less I'm lit, the more spellbound my crowd;

I accept all colours, and with a warming hum
I turn them white and hide them in a cloud.
To give long life is a power I'm allowed
by my servant, Death. I am what you can't sell
at the world's end — and if you're still beetle-browed
try some of my treasures: an adult bird in its shell
or a pink porker in his own gut, Fritz the Abstract Animal.

No riddles about a crane. This one drops a black clanger on cars
and the palm of its four-thumbed steel hand is a raptor of wrecked tubing;
the ones up the highway hoist porridgy concrete, long spars
and the local skyline; whether raising aloft on a string
bizarre workaday angels, or letting down a rotating
man on a sphere, these machines are inclined to maintain
a peace like world war, in which we turn over everything
to provide unceasing victories. Now the fluent lines stop, and strain
engrosses this tower on the frontier of junk, this crane.

Before a landscape sprouts those giant stepladders that pump oil
or before far out iron mosquitoes attach to the sea
there is this sortilege with phones that plug into mapped soil,
the odd gelignite bump to shake trucks, paper scribbling out serially
as men dial Barrier Reefs long enfolded beneath the geology
or listen for black Freudian beaches; they seek a miles-wide pustular
rock dome of pure Crude, a St Paul's-in-profundis. There are many
wrong numbers on the geophone, but it's brought us some distance, and by car.
Every machine has been love and a true answer.

Not a high studded ship boiling cauliflower under her keel
nor a ghost in bootlaced canvas—just a length of country road
afloat between two shores, winding wet wire rope reel-to-reel,
dismissing romance sternwards. Six cars and a hay truck are her load
plus a thoughtful human cast which could, in some dramatic episode,
become a world. All machines in the end join God's creation
growing bygone, given, changeless—but a river ferry has its timeless mode
from the grinding reedy outset; it enforces contemplation.
We arrive. We traverse depth in thudding silence. We go on.

The Assimilation of Background

Driving on that wide jute-coloured country
we came at last to the station,
its homestead with lawn and steel awnings
like a fortress against the sun.
And when we knocked, no people answered;
only a black dog came politely
and accompanied us round the verandahs
as we peered into rooms, and called brightly
Anyone home? The billiard room,
shadowed dining room, gauze-tabled kitchen
gave no answer. Cricket bats, ancient
steamer trunks, the chugging coolroom engine
disregarded us. Only the dog's very patient
claws ticked with us out of the gloom
to the grounds' muffling dust, to the machine shed
black with oil and bolts, with the welder
mantis-like on its cylinder of clocks
and then to the stallion's enclosure.
The great bay horse came up to the wire,
gold flares shifting on his muscles, and stood
as one ungelded in a thousand
of his race, but imprisoned for his sex,
a gene-transmitting engine, looking at us
gravely as a spirit, out between
his brain's potent programmes. Then a heifer,
Durham-roan, but with Brahman hump and rings
around her eyes, came and stood among us
and a dressy goat in sable and brushed fawn
ogled us for offerings beyond
the news all had swiftly gathered from us
in silence, and could, it seemed, accept.
We had been received, and no one grew impatient
but only the dog, host-like, walked with us
back to our car. The lawn-watering sprays
ticked over, and over. And we saw
that out on that bare, crusted country
background and foreground had merged;
nothing that existed there was background.

Driving through Sawmill Towns

1

In the high cool country,
having come from the clouds,
down a tilting road
into a distant valley,
you drive without haste. Your windscreen parts the forest,
swaying and glancing, and jammed midday brilliance
crouches in clearings ...
then you come across them,
the sawmill towns, bare hamlets built of boards
with perhaps a store,
perhaps a bridge beyond
and a little sidelong creek alive with pebbles.

2

The mills are roofed with iron, have no walls:
you look straight in as you pass, see lithe men working,

the swerve of a winch,
dim dazzling blades advancing
through a trolley-borne trunk
till it sags apart
in a manifold sprawl of weatherboards and battens.

The men watch you pass:
when you stop your car and ask them for directions,
tall youths look away —
it is the older men who
come out in blue singlets and talk softly to you.

Beside each mill, smoke trickles out of mounds
of ash and sawdust.

3

You glide on through town,
your mudguards damp with cloud.
The houses there wear verandahs out of shyness,
all day in calendared kitchens, women listen
for cars on the road,
lost children in the bush,
a cry from the mill, a footstep —
nothing happens.

The half-heard radio sings
its song of sidewalks.

Sometimes a woman, sweeping her front step,

or a plain young wife at a tankstand fetching water
in a metal bucket will turn round and gaze
at the mountains in wonderment,
looking for a city.

4

Evenings are very quiet. All around
the forest is there.
As night comes down, the houses watch each other:
a light going out in a window here has meaning.

You speed away through the upland,
glare through towns
and are gone in the forest, glowing on far hills.

On summer nights
ground-crickets sing and pause.
In the dark of winter, tin roofs sough with rain,
downpipes chafe in the wind, agog with water.
Men sit after tea
by the stove while their wives talk, rolling a dead match
between their fingers,
thinking of the future.

The Farm Terraces

Beautiful merciless work
around the slopes of Earth
terraces cut by curt hoe
at the orders of hunger
or a pointing lord.
Levels eyed up to rhyme
copied from grazing animals
round the steeps of Earth,
balconies filtering water down
stage to stage of drop.
Wind-stirred colours of crop
swell between walked bunds
that recall the beast tracks,
harvests down from the top
by hands long in the earth.
Baskets of rich made soil
boosted up poor by the poor,
ladder by freestone prop
stanzas of chant-long lines
by backwrenching slog, before
money, gave food and drunk
but rip now like slatted sails
(some always did damn do)
down the abrupts of earth.

The New Moreton Bay

(on the conversion to Catholicism of the poet Kevin Hart)

A grog-primed overseer, who later died,
snapped at twenty convicts gasping in a line
That pole ain't heavy! Two men stand aside!
and then two more, *and you, pop-eyes! And you!*
—until the dozen left, with a terrible cry,
broke and were broken
beneath the tons of log they had stemmed aloft desperately.

Because there is no peace in this world's peace
the timber is to carry. Many hands heave customarily,
some step aside, detained by the Happiness Police
or despair's boutiques; it is a continual sway—
but when grace and intent
recruit a fresh shoulder, then we're in the other testament
and the innocent wood lifts line-long, with its leaves and libraries.

Poetry and Religion

Religions are poems. They concert
our daylight and dreaming mind, our
emotions, instinct, breath and native gesture

into the only whole thinking: poetry.
Nothing's said till it's dreamed out in words
and nothing's true that figures in words only.

A poem, compared with an arrayed religion,
may be like a soldier's one short marriage night
to die and live by. But that is a small religion.

Full religion is the large poem in loving repetition;
like any poem, it must be inexhaustible and complete
with turns where we ask Now why did the poet do that?

You can't pray a lie, said Huckleberry Finn;
you can't poe one either. It is the same mirror:
mobile, glancing, we call it poetry,

fixed centrally, we call it a religion,
and God is the poetry caught in any religion,
caught, not imprisoned. Caught as in a mirror

that he attracted, being in the world as poetry
is in the poem, a law against its closure.
There'll always be religion around while there is poetry

or a lack of it. Both are given, and intermittent,
as the action of those birds — crested pigeon, rosella parrot —
who fly with wings shut, then beating, and again shut.

The Mitchells

I am seeing this: two men are sitting on a pole
they have dug a hole for and will, after dinner, raise
I think for wires. Water boils in a prune tin.
Bees hum their shift in unthinning mists of white

bursaria blossom, under the noon of wattles.
The men eat big meat sandwiches out of a styrofoam
box with a handle. One is overheard saying:
drought that year. Yes. Like trying to farm the road.

The first man, if asked, would say *I'm one of the Mitchells*.
The other would gaze for a while, dried leaves in his palm,
and looking up, with pain and subtle amusement,
say *I'm one of the Mitchells*. Of the pair, one has been rich
but never stopped wearing his oil-stained felt hat. Nearly everything
they say is ritual. Sometimes the scene is an avenue.

from Ethnic Radio, 1977

For Helen Darville

The Six Million are worth full grief:
it isn't enough to be stunned—
but showing up your elders' multiculture
so easily is what got you shunned,

that, and pity for the greater working class
which their dream made work in the ground,
eighty million in a darkening red flag
outspread under ice, under grass.

The Instrument

Who reads poetry? Not our intellectuals;
they want to control it. Not lovers, not the combative,
not examinees. They too skim it for bouquets
and magic trump cards. Not poor schoolkids
furtively farting as they get immunized against it.

Poetry is read by the lovers of poetry
and heard by some more they coax to the cafe
or the district library for a bifocal reading.
Lovers of poetry may total a million people
on the whole planet. Fewer than the players of *skat*.

What gives them delight is a never-murderous skim
distilled, to verse mainly, and suspended in rapt
calm on the surface of paper. The rest of poetry
to which this was once integral still rules
the continents, as it always did. But on condition now

that its true name is never spoken: constructs, feral poetry,
the opposite but also the secret of the rational.
And who reads that? Ah, the lovers, the schoolkids,
debaters, generals, crime-lords, everybody reads it:
Porsche, lift-off, Gaia, Cool, patriarchy.

Among the feral stanzas are many that demand your flesh
to embody themselves. Only completed art
free of obedience to its time can pirouette you
through and athwart the larger poems you are in.
Being outside all poetry is an unreachable void.

Why write poetry? For the weird unemployment.
For the painless headaches, that must be tapped to strike
down along your writing arm at the accumulated moment.
For the adjustments after, aligning facets in a verb
before the trance leaves you. For working always beyond

your own intelligence. For not needing to rise
and betray the poor to do it. For a non-devouring fame.
Little in politics resembles it: perhaps
the Australian colonists' re-inventing of the snide
far-adopted secret ballot, in which deflation could hide

and, as a welfare bringer, shame the mass-grave Revolutions,
so axe-edged, so lictor-y.

Was that moral cowardice's one shining world victory?
Breathing in dream-rhythm when awake and far from bed
evinces the gift. Being tragic with a book on your head.

Performance

I starred that night, I shone:
I was footwork and firework in one,

a rocket that wriggled up and shot
darkness with a parasol of brilliants
and a peewee descant on a flung bit;
I was busters of glitter-bombs expanding
to mantle and aurora from a crown,
I was fouettés, falls of blazing paint,
para-flares spot-welding cloudy heaven,
loose gold off fierce toeholds of white,
a finale red-tongued as a haka leap:
that too was a butt of all right!

As usual after any triumph, I was
of course, inconsolable.

from Subhuman Redneck Poems, 1996

The Clear Saline of Theory

Theory has done this:
orphans are filing into school
in the tropical 1940s
and every one of them has parents
living, who try to write to them.
Successive tides of theory
flood the poorest faces with salt.

Art History: The Suburb of Surrealls

We dreamed very wide awake
those days, for obedience's sake:

*In the suburb of Surrealls
horse families board the airline bus
to sell packages of phlegm.
My notebook is hugely swollen.
For some reason I am American.*

Such dreaming is enforceable.
Everyone became guarded;
a tinkling of symbols was heard.
It's the West occupying the dreamworld
because the East has captured reason,
some said. Many ceased to listen.

In fact we'd gone to the dream
for supplies of that instant
paint of the twilight kingdom
which colours every object
supernal, deeply important.
Spirit-surrogate. We even synthesised it.

Exposed to the common air, it
weathered quickly to the tone
of affectless weird despair,
elegant barely contained anger
our new patrons demanded
when we had trained them to it.

False dreamings are imperial
but we couldn't disappoint them
(Few others now read us by choice.
Woolf! Woolf! our master's voice).

To be fair, many of us
had now joined the creative class
and become our masters
— but the paint, when stolen
and breathed straight from the tin,
gave a noble deathly rush
that replaced imagination.

History of the Enlightenment

Faith was a dream technology
but one we couldn't master, or do cold
and it soon became equivocal again.
Mountains got moved by money or the lash
and we started to insult faith
as if it might be piqued and after all
kick in that sacred phase-shift
where cancers vanish, and the
golden brown in their antique clothes
enlarge from photograph size, walking
toward us, all welcoming, with secrets
the day it is Dreamtime in our streets.

You Find You Can Leave It All

Like a charging man, hit
and settling face down in the ringing,
his cause and panic obsolete,

you find you can leave it all:
your loved people, pain, achievement
dwindling upstream of this raft-fall,

back with the dishes that translated
beasts and croplands into the ongoing
self portrait your genes had mandated.

Ribbed fluorescent-panels flow
over you down urgent corridors,
dismissing midday outside. Slow,

they'd resemble wet spade-widths in a pit;
you've left grief behind you, for others;
your funeral: who'll know you'd re-planned it?

God, at the end of prose,
somehow be our poem —
When forebrainy consciousness goes

wordless selves it'd barely met,
inertias of rhythm, the life habit
continue the battle for you.

If enough of those hold
you may wake up in this world,
ache-boned, tear-sponged, dripped into:

Do you know your name? 'Yes' won't do.
It's Before again, with shadow. No tunnels.
You are a trunk of prickling cells.

It's the evening of some day. But it's also
afterlife from here on, by that consent
you found in you, to going where you went.

Ripe in the Arbours of the Nose

Even rippled with sun
the greens of a citrus grove darken
like ocean deepening from shore.
Each tree is full of shade.

A shadowy fast spiral through
and a crow's transfixed an orange
to carry off and mine
its latitudes and longitudes
till they're a parched void scrotum.

Al-Andalus has an orange grove
planted in rows and shaven above
to form an unwalkable dream lawn
viewed from loggias.
One level down,
radiance in a fruit-roofed ambulatory.

Mandarin, if I didn't eat you
how could you ever see the sun?
(Even I will never see it
except in blue translation).

Shedding its spiral pith helmet
an orange is an irrigation
of rupture and bouquet
rocking the lower head about;

one of the milder borders
of the just endurable
is the squint taste of a lemon,

and it was limes, of dark tooled green
which forgave the barefoot sailors
bringing citrus to new dry lands.

Cumquat, you bitter quip,
let a rat make jam of you
in her beardy house.

Blood orange, children!
raspberry blood in the glass:
look for the five o'clock shadow
on their cheeks.
Those are full of blood,
and easy: only pick the ones that
relax off in your hand.

Below Hollywood, as everywhere
the trees of each grove appear
as fantastically open
treasure sacks, tied only at the ground.

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From: The Biplane Houses

High-Speed Bird

At full tilt, air gleamed –
and a window-struck kingfisher,
snatched up, lay on my palm
still beating faintly.

Slowly, a tincture
of whatever consciousness is
infused its tremor, and
ram beak wide as scissors

all hurt loganberry inside,
it crept over my knuckle
and took my outstretched finger
in its wire foot-rings.

Cobalt wings, shutting on beige
body. Gold under-eye whiskers,
beak closing in recovery
it faced outward from me.

For maybe twenty minutes
we sat together, one on one,
as if staring back or
forward into prehistory.

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From: Taller When Prone

Panic Attack

The body had a nightmare.
Awake. No need of the movie.

No need of light, to keep hips
and shoulders rotating in bed
on the gimbals of wet eyes.

Pounding heart, chest pains –
should it be the right arm hurting?

The brain was a void
or a blasted-out chamber –
shreds of speech in there,
shatters of lust and prayer.

No one can face their heart
or turn their back on it.

Bowel stumbled to bowl,
emptied, and emptied again
till the gut was a train
crawling in its own tunnel,

slowly dragging the nightmare
down with it, below heart level.
You would not have died

the fear had been too great
but: to miss the ambulance moment –

Relax. In time, your hourglass
will be reversed again.

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From: The Biplane Houses

A Brief History

We are the Australians. Our history is short.
This makes pastry chefs snotty and racehorses snort.
It makes pride a blood poppy and work an export
and bars our trained minds from original thought
as all that can be named gets renamed away.

A short history gets you imperial scorn,
maintained by hacks after the empire is gone
which shaped and exiled us, left men's bodies torn
with the lash, then with shrapnel, and taught many to be
lewd in kindness, formal in bastardry.

Some Australians would die before they said Mate,
though hand-rolled Mate is a high-class disguise —
but to have just one culture is well out of date:
it makes you Exotic, i.e. there to penetrate
or to ingest, depending on size.

Our one culture paints Dreamings, each a beautiful claim.
Far more numerous are the unspeakable Whites,
the only cause of all earthly plights,
immigrant natives without immigrant rights.
Unmixed with these are Ethnic, absolved of all blame.

All of people's Australia, its churches and lore
are gang-raped by satire self-righteous as war
and, from trawling fresh victims to set on the poor,
our mandarins now, in one more evasion
of love and themselves, declare us Asian.

Australians are like most who won't read this poem
or any, since literature turned on them
and bodiless jargons without reverie
scorn their loves as illusion and biology,
compared with bloody History, the opposite of home.

The Future

There is nothing about it. Much science fiction is set there
but is not about it. Prophecy is not about it.
It sways no yarrow stalks. And crystal is a mirror.
Even the man we nailed on a tree for a lookout
said little about it; he told us evil would come.
We see, by convention, a small living distance into it
but even that's a projection. And all our projections
fail to curve where it curves.
It is the black hole
out of which no radiation escapes to us.

The commonplace and magnificent roads of our lives
go on some way through cityscape and landscape
or steeply sloping, or scree, into that sheer fall
where everything will be that we have ever sent there,
compacted, spinning — except perhaps us, to see it.
It is said we see the start.
But, from here, there's a blindness.
The side-heaped chasm that will swallow all our present
blinds us to the normal sun that may be imagined
shining calmly away on the far side of it, for others
in their ordinary day. A day to which all our portraits,
ideals, revolutions, denim and deshabelle
are quaintly heartrending. To see those people is impossible,
to greet them, mawkish. Nonetheless, I begin:
'When I was alive —'
and I am turned around
to find myself looking at a cheerful picnic party,
the women decently legless, in muslin and gloves,
the men in beards and weskits, with the long
cheroots and duck trousers of the better sort,
relaxing on a stone verandah. Ceylon, or Sydney.
And as I look, I know they are utterly gone,
each one on his day, with pillow, small bottles, mist,
with all the futures they dreamed or dealt in, going
down to that engulfment everything approaches;
with the man on the tree, they have vanished into the Future.

Science Fiction

I can travel
faster than light
so can you
the speed of thought
the only trouble
is at destinations
our thought balloons
are coated invisible
no one there sees us
and we can't get out
to be real or present
phone and videophone
are almost worse
we don't see a journey
but stay in our space
just talking and joking
with those we reach
but can never touch
the nothing that can hurt us
how lovely and terrible
and lonely is this.

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From: Taller When Prone

The Scores

1901

When we were all servants
scrubbing off Madam's slurs
I gave up my baby
and the black girl kept hers.
When I got my own high horse
living things felt my spurs
and the flowers were all golden wattle.

1921

That weak word the *Battlers*:
I saw from the train
families punch hoods from wheat bags
to keep out the rain;
Tom said a seller's market
made Australian girls vain
and for Tom the flowers were poppies.

1941

Ar there, Ginger Meggs:
was it Susso tea and suet
put those calipers on your legs?
If Sister Kenny could do it
you'd walk again like a trooper,
left-right and left-right
and the wreaths would be Singapore orchids.

1961

We came because here were no politics
said your in-laws. *Sweet monotonous languor!*
and a *pill* was a sexless bore at school
but one brought bassinets under control;
you were young and free for longer:
somehow this caused great anger
and soon flowers came by wire from America.

1981

You rose climbing up,
you rose going down
as snide peace with few imports
hung on in your home town.
When green learned to rust iron
dinners dared not be brown
and the flowers were flung gladioli.

2001

Fashion ruled, but another queen reigned.

Some flickers of nonsense remained:
It's evening here, Nonna, so hey!
The world won't be ending today.
One last war-trip, and none of ours killed!
Collective rights alone were instilled;
the singular was gagged and at bay
and the flowers were Olympic Gold roses.

Spring Hail

This is for spring and hail, that you may remember:
for a boy long ago, and a pony that could fly.

We had huddled together a long time in the shed
in the scent of vanished corn and wild bush birds,
and then the hammering faltered, and the torn
cobwebs ceased their quivering and hung still
from the nested rafters. We became uneasy
at the silence that grew about us, and came out.

The beaded violence had ceased. Fresh-minted hills
smoked, and the heavens swirled and blew away.
The paddocks were endless again, and all around
leaves lay beneath their trees, and cakes of moss.
Sheep trotted and propped, and shook out ice from their wool.
The hard blue highway that had carried us there
fumed as we crossed it, and the hail I scooped
from underfoot still bore the taste of sky
and hurt my teeth, and crackled as we walked.

This is for spring and hail, that you may remember
a boy long ago, and a pony that could fly.

With the creak and stop of a gate, we started to trespass:
my pony bent his head and drank up grass
while I ate ice, and wandered, and ate ice.
There was a peach tree growing wild by a bank
and under it and round, sweet dented fruit
weeping pale juice amongst hail-shotten leaves,
and this I picked up and ate till I was filled.

I sat on a log then, listening with my skin
to the secret feast of the sun, to the long wet worms
at work in the earth, and, deeper down, the stones
beneath the earth, uneasy that their sleep
should be troubled by dreams of water soaking down,
and I heard with my ears the creek on its bed of mould
moving and passing with a mothering sound.

This is for spring and hail, that you may remember
a boy long ago on a pony that could fly.

My pony came up then and stood by me,
waiting to be gone. The sky was now
spotless from dome to earth, and balanced there
on the cutting-edge of mountains. It was time
to leap to the saddle and go, a thunderbolt whirling

sheep and saplings behind, and the rearing fence
that we took at a bound, and the old, abandoned shed
forgotten behind, and the paddock forgotten behind.
Time to shatter peace and lean into spring
as into a battering wind, and be rapidly gone.

It was time, high time, the highest and only time
to stand in the stirrups and shout out, blind with wind
for the height and clatter of ridges to be topped
and the racing downward after through the lands
of floating green and bridges and flickering trees.
It was time, as never again it was time
to pull the bridle up, so the racketing hooves

fell silent as we ascended from the hill
above the farms, far up to where the hail
formed and hung weightless in the upper air,
charting the birdless winds with silver roads
for us to follow and be utterly gone.

This is for spring and hail, that you may remember
a boy and a pony long ago who could fly.

A Retrospect of Humidity

All the air conditioners now slacken
their hummed carrier wave. Once again
we've served our three months with remissions
in the steam and dry iron of this seaboard.
In jellied glare, through the nettle-rash season
we've watched the sky's fermenting laundry
portend downpours. Some came, and steamed away,
and we were clutched back into the rancid
saline midnights of orifice weather,
to damp grittiness and wiping off the air.

Metaphors slump irritably together in
the muggy weeks. Shark and jellyfish shallows
become suburbs where you breathe a fat towel;
babies burst like tomatoes with discomfort
in the cotton-wrapped pointing street markets;
the Lycra-bulging surf drips from non-swimmers
miles from shore, and somehow includes soil.
Skins, touching, soak each other. Skin touching
any surface wets that and itself
in a kind of mutual digestion.
Throbbing heads grow lianas of nonsense.

It's our annual visit to the latitudes
of rice, kerosene and resignation,
an averted, temporary visit
unrelated, for most, to the attitudes
of festive northbound jets gaining height -
closer, for some few, to the memory
of ulcers scraped with a tin spoon
or sweated faces bowing before dry
where the flesh is worn inside out,
all the hunger-organs clutched in rank nylon,
by those for whom exhaustion is spirit:

an intrusive, heart-narrowing season
at this far southern foot of the monsoon.
As the kleenex flower, the hibiscus
drops its browning wads, we forget
annually, as one forgets a sickness.
The stifling days will never come again,
not now that we've seen the first sweater
tugged down on the beauties of division
and inside the rain's millions, a risen
loaf of cat on a cool night verandah.

Late Summer Fires

The paddocks shave black
with a foam of smoke that stays,
welling out of red-black wounds.

In the white of a drought
this happens. The hardcourt game.
Logs that fume are mostly cattle,

inverted, stubby. Tree stumps are kilns.
Walloped, wiped, hand-pumped,
even this day rolls over, slowly.

At dusk, a family drives sheep
out through the yellow
of the Aboriginal flag.

Sunflowers

I am ever fresh cells who keep on knowing my name
but I converse in my myriads with the great blast Cell
who holds the centre of reality, carries it behind the cold
and on out, for converse with a continuum of adorers:

The more presence, the more apart. And the more lives circling you.
Falling, I gathered such presence that I fused to Star, beyond all fission —
We face our leaves and ever-successive genitals toward you.
Presence is why we love what we cannot eat or mate with —

We are fed from attachment and you, our futures draw weight from both, and
droop.

All of my detached life lives on death or sexual casings —
The studded array of our worship struggles in the noon not to lose you.
I pumped water to erect its turning, weighted its combs with floury oil —

You are more intense than God, and fiercely dopey, and we adore you.
Presence matches our speed; thus it seems not flow but all arrivals —
We love your overbalance, your plunge into utterness — but what is presence?
*The beginning, mirrored everywhere. The true indictment. The end all through
the story.*

Cell DNA

I am the singular
in free fall.
I and my doubles
carry it all:

life's slim volume
spirally bound.
It's what I'm about,
it's what I'm around.

Presence and hungers
imbue a sap mote
with the world as they spin it.
I teach it by rote

but its every command
was once a miscue
that something rose to,
Presence and freedom

re-wording, re-beading
strains on a strand
making I and I more different
than we could stand.

Bats' Ultrasound

Sleeping-bagged in a duplex wing
with fleas, in rock-cleft or building
radar bats are darkness in miniature,
their whole face one tufty crinkled ear
with weak eyes, fine teeth bared to sing.

Few are vampires. None flit through the mirror.
Where they flutter at evening's a queer
tonal hunting zone above highest C.
Insect prey at the peak of our hearing
drone re to their detailing tee:

ah, eyrie-ire, aero hour, eh?
O'er our ur-area (our era aye
ere your raw row) we air our array,
err, yaw, row wry — aura our orrery,
our eerie ü our ray, our arrow.

A rare ear, our aery Yahweh.

Evening Alone At Bunyah

1

My father, widowed, fifty-six years old,
sits washing his feet.
The innocent sly charm
is back in his eye of late years, and tonight
he's going dancing.

*I wouldn't go tonight, he says to me
by way of apology. You sure you won't come?
What for? I ask. You know I only dance
on bits of paper. He nods and says, Well, if
any ghosts come calling, don't let 'em eat my cake.*

I bring him a towel and study his feet afresh:
they make my own feel coarse. They are so small,
so delicate he can scarcely bear to walk
barefoot to his room to find his dancing shoes
and yet all day he works in hobnailed boots
out in the forest, clearing New South Wales.

No ghosts will come, Dad. I know you dote on cake.
I know how some women who bake it dote on you.
It gets them nowhere.
You are married still.

2

Home again from the cities of the world.
Cool night, and the valley relaxes after heat,
the earth contracts, the planks of the old house creak,
making one more adjustment, joist to nail,
nail to roof, roof to the touch of dew.

Smoke stains, rafters, whitewash rubbed off planks ...
yet this is one house that Jerry built to last:
when windstorms came, and other houses lost
roofs and verandahs, this gave just enough
and went unscathed, for all the little rain
that sifted through cracks, the lamps puffed out by wind
sucked over the wallplate, and the occasional bat
silly with fear at having misplaced the dark.

When I was a child, my father was ashamed
of this shabby house. It signified for him
hard work and unjust poverty. There would come
a day when he'd tear it down and build afresh.
The day never came. But that's another poem.

No shame I felt in those days was my own.
It can be enough to read books and camp in a house.
Enough, at fourteen, to watch your father sit
at the breakfast table nursing his twelve-gauge
shotgun, awaiting the doubtful reappearance
of a snake's head at a crack in the cement
of the skillion fireplace floor.

The blood's been sluiced
away, and the long wrecked body of the snake
dug out and gone to ash these thirteen years,
but the crack's still there,
and the scores the buckshot ripped beside the stove.

3

There is a glow in the kitchen window now
that was not there in the old days. They have set
three streetlights up along the Gloucester road
for cows to stray by, and night birds to shun,
for the road itself's not paved, and there's no town
in the valley yet at all.
It is hoped there will be.

Today, out walking, I considered stones.
It used to be said that I must know each one
on the road by its first name, I was such a dawdler,
such a head-down starrer.
I picked up
a chunk of milk-seamed quartz, thumbing off the clay,
let the dry light pervade it and collect,
eliciting shifting gleams, revealing how
the specific strength of a stone fits utterly
into its form and yet reflects the grain
and tendency of the mother-lode, the mass
of a vanished rock-sill tipping one small stone
slightly askew as it weighs upon your palm,
and then I threw it back towards the sun
to thump down on a knoll
where it may move a foot in a thousand years.

Today, having come back, summer was all mirror
tormenting me. I fled down cattle tracks
chest-deep in the earth, and pushed in under twigs
to sit by cool water speeding over rims
of blackened basalt, the tall light reaching me.

Since those moth-grimed streetlamps came,
my dark is threatened.

4

I stand, and turn, and wander through the house,
avoiding those floorboards that I know would creak,
to the other verandah. Here is where I slept,
and here is where, one staring day, I felt
a presence at my back, and whirled in fright
to face my father's suit, hung out to air.

This country is my mind. I lift my face
and count my hills, and linger over one:
Deer's, steep, bare-topped, where eagles nest below
the summit in scrub oaks, and where I take
my city friends to tempt them with my past.

Across the creek and the paddocks of the moon
four perfect firs stand dark beside a field
lost long ago, which holds a map of rooms.
This was the plot from which we transplants sprang.
The trees grew straight. We burgeoned and spread far.
I think of doors and rooms beneath the ground,
deep rabbit rooms, thin candlelight of days ...
and, turning quickly, walk back through the house.

5

Night, and I watch the moonrise through the door.
Sitting alone's a habit of mind with me ...
for which I'll pay in full. That has begun.
But meanwhile I will sit and watch the moon.

My father will be there now, at a hall
in the dark of the country, shining at the waltz,
spry and stately, twirling at formal speeds
on a roaring waxed-plank floor.
The petrol lamps
sizzle and glare now the clapping has died down.
They announce some modern dance. He steps outside
to where cigarettes glow sparsely in the dark,
joins some old friends and yarns about his son.

Beneath this moon, an ancient radiance comes
back from far hillsides where the tall pale trunks
of ringbarked trees haphazardly define
the edge of dark country I could not afford
to walk in at night alone
lest I should hear
the barking of dogs from a clearing where no house
has ever stood, and, walking down a road
in the wilderness, meet a man who waited there
beside a creek to tell me what I sought.

Father, come home soon.
Come home alive.

The Conversations

A full moon always rises at sunset
and a person is taller at night.
Many fear their phobias more than death.
The glass King of France feared he'd shatter.
Chinese eunuchs kept their testes in spirit.

Your brain can bleed from a sneeze-breath.
A full moon always rises at sunset
and a person is taller when prone.
Donald Duck was once banned in Finland
because he didn't wear trousers,
his loins were feather-girt like Daisy's
but no ostrich hides its head in sand,
The cure for scurvy was found
then long lost through medical theory.
The Beginning is a steady white sound.

The full moon rises at sunset
and lemurs and capuchin monkeys
pass a millipede round to get off on
its powerful secretions. Mouthing it
they wriggle in bliss on the ground.

The heart of a groomed horse slows down.
A fact is a small compact faith,
a sense-datum to beasts, a power to man
even if true, even while true—
we read these laws in Isaac Neurone.

One woman had sixty nine children.
Some lions mate fifty times a day.
Napoleon had a victory addiction.
A full moon always rises at sunset.
Soldiers now can get in the family way.

The Moon Man

Shadowy kangaroos moved off
as we drove into the top paddock
coming home from a wedding
under a midnightish curd sky

then his full face cleared:
Moon man, the first birth ever
who still massages his mother
and sends her light, for his having

been born fully grown.
His brilliance is in our blood.
Had Earth fully healed from that labour
no small births could have happened.

The Dialectic of Dreams

Dream harbours Sin, and Innocence, and Magic,
re-stews mundane cabbage, stacks a shifting Tarot,
equivocates naïvely about Death, the secular Absolute —

things Rationality, the replacement aristocrat
approves only for enhancement. By midday
it has clarified its twinship with that relic —

but it comes round again, by deep night at the latest,
in a skin boat sailing on the blood
for dream lives its life engorged. It owns tumescence,

makes eerie conquests, can engender children —
though few who see the sun. The real takes some joint permission
and all of ourself not in the dream lies flaccid.

Every night, stepped mast or unfurled sail,
we reach a land where nothing is held trivial.

Real dreams are from home · back there. The light as it was,
will be, might have been · all the receding dream-tenses.

The dreamer is even yourself · or you're aware it is.
There in the action, unsafe · greater than the action, passive,

rarely uttering, in the endless · preparations, for horror, for happiness,
those appalling formulae · other-directed at us

which may persist as salt foam · on the margin of lapsed scenes
or, like the filmed cities, be resumed · into their own presence.

And that otherworld incongruence · spindling faintly through the day,
heightening thought, blanking it · silvering, beckoning away:

preternatural, those interiors · half-recalled by consciousness,
they were never in this world · not in your life, those wet bossed lanes.

Yet this is the heart of work · *the human sage, the butterfly*
to be conscious at the source of worlds · rapt, raising the ante.

The daylight oil, the heavier grade of Reason,
reverie's clear water, that of the dreamworld ocean
agitate us and are shaken, forming the emulsion

without which we make nothing much. Not art,
not love, not war, not its reasoned nightmare methods,
not the Taj, not our homes, not the Masses or the gods

— but the fusion persists in the product, not in us.
A wheel shatters, drains our pooled rainbow. It was a moment:
the world is debris and museum of that moment,

its prospectus and farm. The wheel is turned by this engine.
I think of the people and buildings in a business street,
how they lack a perfect valve to take on and release

unceasing fusions. And will be pulled down for it,
their walls dreamed on in the milk of obsolete children.

Dream surrounds, is infused with this world. It is not subordinate.
We come from it; we live at tangents and accords with it; we go
back into it, at last, through the drowsing torture chambers to it.

We have gills for dream-life, in our head; we must keep them wet
from the nine-nights' immense, or dreams will emerge bodily, and enforce it.
Hide among or deny the shallow dreadful ones, and they may stay out:

moor things in Heaven and earth then, Ratio, anyhow you can
because dream's the looseleaf book, not of fiction, but of raw Pretend,
incalculable as this world when the God of Mercy intervened often.

It is the free splitting from God that parts Nature from dream.
They refresh each other with bafflement, each as the other's underground
freeing lives to be finite, because more; to be timeless, yet pure preparation —

while those spaces, sacred as the poor, of the haloed russet kingdom
are tigers impelling us, full of futures and pasts, toward a present.

MUDROOROO

(a.k.a. Colin Johnson) b. 1938

The legendary Mudrooroo hails from the back of beyond of Western Australia, where the sun bakes the earth red and the flooding rains recede to let the wildflowers bloom briefly. His father died when he was unborn and even the identity of his mother has become in doubt. When questioned about his dubious genealogy, he replies with a smile, "In The Hero With a Thousand Faces, it says that the antecedents of a hero are always in doubt." He leaves it at that.

From his birth the life of Mudrooroo was unsettled and his mother moved him along the York-Narrogin road until finally settling in Beverley. About this town, he recalls wryly: "No one spoke to us and at school I along with the Aboriginal kids had our own private desk where we sat ignored. I didn't turn up much."

After a while the Child Welfare intervened and he was sent south to Perth. Parts of his early life he wrote about in his first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*. He describes this novel as a deep text dealing not only with the injustices of life, but also with the way Beatniks then in vogue approached jazz and jazz musicians.

After a few years, Mudrooroo availed himself of an offer to be sent to Melbourne. He stayed in that city sampling its Bohemian life, then left for South East Asia and ended up in swinging London. He travelled with his wife Jenny and when she had to return to Melbourne, he went back there, stayed briefly and left for India. He travelled there for five years, three of them as a Buddhist monk, then returned to Australia, Sydney, Melbourne and finally Perth. There he met an American girl Elaine and eventually followed her back to California, San Francisco, where he pilgrimaged to City Lights Bookshop in North Beach and Haight Ashbury, before hitting the road and hitchhiking up the West Coast to Canada.

Returning to San Francisco, he sampled the culture there, doing Primal Therapy which he found interesting and lived with the Moonies whom he found fascistic. Having overstayed his visa, he left for Australia before being deported, and entered into his Aboriginality. He met Burnam Burnam, the actor and activist, and went with him to Monash University to attend a lecture at the Aboriginal Studies Centre there. He met the director, Colin Bourke and was invited to participate with him in writing a children's book. The result was *Before the Invasion*. After this he decided to do an historical novel and settled on Tasmania. The result was his popular, *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the ending of the World*. He made a number of trips to the Island and walked all over it. About this time, he says: "When I was writing *Wooreddy*, I still considered my ego not large enough to tackle Australia" – which elicits the question: "And now do you consider it large enough?" "After doing my *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, I consider it bigger than Australia, as big as the universe," he replies with a grin, which makes one doubt his words until one realises the extent of his travels.

The job ran out and Mudrooroo moved on to Melbourne University where he obtained a scholarship for Indian Studies. At the same time, he became a tutor in Koori Kollej, teaching Aboriginal students. It was then that his literary career began and he, along with the Aboriginal Playwright, Jack Davis and Marlene Chesson formed The Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists' Association (AWOLDA).

He organised three conferences and sought to establish the Association on a solid basis, but it was difficult to find willing workers and the Association became extinct. Apart from this failure, he did establish Aboriginal Writings courses at the University of Queensland and Murdoch University. It is from this period that his theoretical works date.

He obtained a five year contract to teach at Murdoch University which he describes as a writing grant. He used his time at the University to good effect and produced his seminal work, *Us Mob* which summed up his approach to Aboriginality as well as his disappointment in the Aboriginal movement. Rash words often produce rash results and this happened in Mudrooroo's case when he was asked to prove his Aboriginality. He took this as a personal insult at the time and retorted,

"Am I to write a fictional life story as other's have done to prove who I am. I never knew my father and even my mother is in doubt. So just see me as a mongrel and forget any other labels."

Although he was getting on in age, Mudrooroo left Western Australia and moved to Queensland. He lived on an island off the Queensland coast away from all strife. There he finished his mythic early history of the southern coast of Australia, and then wrote two novels set in Queensland, which had fascinated him since the time of the Bjelke-Petersen Government and his writing of *The Kwinkan* set in that era. Mudrooroo's detractors still continued to pester him and he decided to leave Australia.

He returned to India, to Dharamsala in the foothills of the Himalayas which is the capital of the Free Tibetans. He met the Dalai Lama there and received initiations from him. After Dharamsala, he penetrated deeper into the mountains and reached the valley of Katmandu. Further North in the shadow of Everest, he met his heart's companion, Sangita, and now they have a son, Saman. Both husband and wife are avid nomads and they hope to soon travel to the axis munda of the earth, Mount Kailash. Until then, he is writing his autobiography, *Not My Place?* or contemplating it when he is looking after his son.

A Righteous Day

The following poem "A Righteous Day" was written to coincide with the Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988 - which marked 200 years since White or European Settlement of Australia. It was a controversial issue for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who felt that this was not something to celebrate, but rather mourn. The 26th of January is a public holiday in Australia, marking the landing of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove. Since 1938 many politically active Aboriginals began to call it the Day of Mourning.

A lifetime of inventions sticky-taping a zipper into
A ballpoint pen filled with transistorised tunes
Protecting my wrists from the slashes of insecurities.
Today, I shall hold my head higher than
The kites are flying, swooping down on this
Today, I shall keep my violence passive in anger,
My voice shall be a steel spring coiled.
Today, I shall cut a smile into the provocation of insults.
Today, I shall walk tall with the leaders who walk on
Stilts and stumble as they greet me with cries of goodwill.
Today, I shall stand sober and high under the railway bridge
Echoing and resounding with the slap-slap of straight razors
Stropping on the skin of a year mourning bleeding.
Today, I shall let my fist be clenched in songs;
Today, I shall speech-give the essence of my truth;
Today, I shall be free of harassment and let my steps
Lead me away from the red and black along the golden path
Of the honeyed sunshining of my dreams.
Today, I shall find a will to be responsive to our needs.
For today, this day is our day and don't forget it!
'My bloody oath I won't, mate!'

(Sydney, 26 January 1988)

J. S. HARRY

b. 1939

J. S. Harry (or Jan Harry; born 1939) is a contemporary Australian poet who has been described as “one of Australian poetry’s keenest satirists, political and social commentators, and perhaps its most ethical agent and antagonist.”

J. S. Harry was born in South Australia, but soon moved to Sydney where she has remained. She has worked as an editor for Radio National and has held a residency at Australian National University. A recurrent character in her work is Peter Henry Lepus, a rabbit who name-drops philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer while popping up in the midst of topical events such as the Gulf War. His satirical “clear-eyed vision of the world, and the humans that inhabit it, is that of an Everyrabbit, with its endless simplicity, trepidation and curiosity.”

Among other accolades J. S. Harry has won the Harri Jones Memorial Prize for Poetry, the Poetry Society’s Book of the Year, the PEN International Lyne Phillips Poetry Prize and the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry. Her most recent work is *Not Finding Wittgenstein* (2007) a ‘collected works’ of Peter Henry Lepus.

J. S. Harry has published five volumes of poetry. Her first book, *The Deer Under the Skin* (1971), was awarded the Harri Jones Memorial Prize and chosen as the Poetry Society’s Book of the Year. *A Dandelion for Van Gogh*, her third collection, was shortlisted for the National Book Council Awards in 1985 and the Adelaide Festival Poetry Awards in 1986. The title poem of her fourth book, *The Life on the Water and the Life Beneath* (1995) won the PEN International Lyne Phillips Poetry Prize. Her *Selected Poems* was co-winner of the NSW Premier’s 1996 Kenneth Slessor Poetry Award. *The Life on Water and The Life Beneath* is her most recent single collection.

Did Peter Henry really meet a young Wittgenstein in Vienna in 1902 or at another time in ‘Antarctica’ followed by a crowd of six students levitating across the ice? Did he watch Picasso munch on a Greek salad with his Dad at the *Nippy Rabbit*, or listen to Bertrand Russell discourse on what the young Wittgenstein would come to write? And what of Peter Henry in Iraq during the invasion happening upon A. J. Ayer? Readers outside Australia may still be wondering who this rabbit with the strangely familiar name is, how he ended up in so many almost recognisable places (‘Japan’, ‘Calcutta’, Australia) and what he is doing today, last seen, as these most recent poems show, in Iraq.

According to J.S. Harry’s introduction to the first accounts of this rabbitesque Leopold Bloom in *The Life On Water And The Life Beneath*, Peter Henry Lepus was named by his highly literate mother after a character from a book of old Creole folk tales titled *L’Histoire de Pierre Henri Lepus*. Harry continues, despite the Creole on his mother’s side, Peter Henry is a British rabbit. Having grown up in the English countryside in the early twentieth century, he ended up in a children’s book, before beginning his peregrinations and long study of philosophy. According to Harry, “it was around the time A. N. Whitehead and Bertrand Russell were working their way toward the *Principia Mathematica* . . . Peter Henry Lepus was provoked

into trying to use his mind,” continuing that, “It is perhaps from this period onward that his sense of deracination and disorientation becomes more pronounced . . . ”. Peter Henry’s deracination and disorientation have now spanned an entire century, equal to living memory, and the accounts gathered by Harry appear to suggest that Peter Henry’s experience may not be so much attributed to a weak, rabbit mind, but a product of the times, and the humans who create them.

Peter Henry’s longevity is remarkable. He has lived through World Wars, invasions, drought, bushfire, the evolution of contemporary philosophy, epidemics of myxomatosis, AIDS and American poetry, the Poet’s Union Ball, a meeting with Chairman Miaow, discussed ‘Marks’ (or Marx as Russell had it) with American critics, British philosophers and Australian poets, met Mother Teresa in ‘Calcutta’, nibbled on Derrida, and generally lived as full a life as any thinking rabbit might in the twentieth century. If he were human, he might be an Everyman. But his clear-eyed vision of the world, and the humans that inhabit it, is that of an *Everyrabbit*, with its endless simplicity, trepidation and curiosity. As he hops through the various systems of thought humans have raveled and constructed in the hope of understanding the terrible worlds they create, we catch glimpses of a simple, fuller world. Some might think of Peter Henry as naive, like something from a children’s story, not really suited to the real world. Some of us, listening to this ever-curious and almost tireless rabbit, with his simple and direct questions and common sense, might begin to see that world more clearly, in the light of the confusing and often grim tales it tells.

In a reading of modern Australian poetry, Harry’s work is absolutely indispensable. Since her first collection was published in 1971, J. S. Harry has quietly assumed the role of one of Australian poetry’s keenest satirists, political and social commentators, and perhaps its most ethical agent and antagonist. She is Swift, Orwell and Potter, rolled into one, and her poetry is unique not simply in Australian poetry but at an international level. Her collections have won a swag of awards and her main avatar of wit and perception, Peter Henry Lepus, is without question a national (perhaps, ‘Australian’) treasure.

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A Preface?

Peter Henry Lepus is not fond of “Prefaces”; he says that though they are the “face” you see before the “face” of the other writing, he feels they should more properly be called

placed-first tail notes, as they are done after the longer writing.

Peter Henry has one paw resting

on a fat volume of Derrida;

he can’t lift it but someone kind

has copied one whole paragraph out

in BIG letters

& pinned it to a broad-trunked tree.

The trunk is covered by the writing

which is on white paper and easy to read.

What it signifies he had no idea

but he likes to run questioningly to & fro

& nibble on a sentence’s

“possible meanings”.

Some of it will sink in

in time he thinks . . .

He is older, now, than he was

when those poems were written.

It is later now than it was then, whenever then was.

Between one line & another there is white

space, between one live trunk & another,

there is an opening . . .

Extract from “A Perspectived Report on an Australian Menace” (soon to be published by The Asylum of the Rabbit Press): The Hairy Rabbiters

On the first fleet
were several silverish
grey haired rabbiters.
On arrival they bred quickly.
Like a silver-greyish human blanket
the hairy rabbiters spread across Australia.
Rabbiters were distressed.
In the year of the Federation of the Rabbit,
the government gave unprecedented amounts
of electricity, money & fencing materials
to help rabbits build fences
to keep the hairy rabbiters out. But the rabbiters had
sharp teeth
& having bitten through the fences, then used to bite the sheep,
at first eating them raw but later setting bushfires, to barbecue
the sheep in large numbers, which irritated
the colonial-imperialist
aims of the foxes. Parts of Australia
could never be the same as England
once the rabbiters had arrived.
They were such a pest to the multiplication of sheep
that the Government of New South Wales
gave a bounty of five cents a head
for the scalp of each rabbit collected.
Children killed rabbiters on their
way to school. Carts pulled by
compliant horses
hauled away
the carcasses of the dead rabbiters.
In 1888 there were millions of wild rabbiters in Australia.
Before refrigeration,
the redblooded ones were canned & sent to England as food.
Sometimes cans of these dead rabbiters
exploded in the Red Sea making it
even more red than ketchup
on corpses in Dolby Digital movies.
Thousands of snakes were bred & released in
rabbit-infested areas such as deserts & swamps.
But snakes
were not good at catching the rabbiters.
They preferred to hunt & strike
small mammals & birds

which were easier to paralyse & swallow.
The snakes soon grew into huge feral monsters
which terrorized the sheep by
striking them from underneath.
Rabbits have used all kinds of gases and smells
to try to drive the rabbiters off the continent.
But the rabbitier has never been a lemming.
Rabbits resorted to mixing imported oleander bark
in the rabbitiers' beer and billy tea.
But it was a slow way to kill them & innocent
insects, European wasps
& birds drank the lethal billy tea & beer. Today rabbits use
four-wheel drive vehicles
& hunt the rabbitiers with sharp-toothed ankle-traps –
& guns. Trucks with freezers carry the
skinned & dissected rabbitiers to market. They
make a tasty delicacy on table d'hôte for tourists.
A factory makes thousands of hats from rabbitiers' epiderms.
About fifteen rabbitiers' skins are needed
to make one Akubra hat.
In recent months a form of AIDS which only affects rabbitiers
has been introduced. Rabbits reject this as too brutal.

On The Outskirts Of “War”?

Plink! plink! Polluted water drips from a rusty pipe,
onto something in a dark corner.
Peter wakes to this sound.
He remembers entering the city
seeing a construction, a building
Picasso-cream, & tall,
with a rounded top
like an onion.
It is plainly not a mosque.
He has seen human sacred sites before.
Part of this building’s side has been torn away.
It is like a big burrow open to the moonlight.
He remembers going inside . . .

It is where he is now. There is nothing to eat.
No sacks of potatoes or vegetables.
The earth smells mouldy; there is a glint of light
near where the water pools & spills,
but nothing grows.
To his right,
above a date palm with half its top blown off
he sees two tiny points of light.
Against the wall that’s closest to the moon
there’s the outline of a man.
A voice questions softly:
Joshua, why don’t you try & find them?
Why are you still here?
The voice seems to be talking to itself.
Peter Henry Lepus can see no other human there.
He listens. It seems the man has built
the house for his fifteen wives, that he is one
of the over-five-million
believers in
the Church of Jesus Christ
of the Latter-day Saints,
who are scattered throughout the world.
His wives scattered out through Baghdad,
leaving him behind
when the bombs began to fall.
They are all called “Smith”, like him
& they came, with him, to this place.
Each one
had a separate
apartment, within the rounded building, so he did not know,
till he went to find
one, & then another . . . & another . . .
that, finally, he was all alone.

His voice goes back, he is reminiscing
as Peter has heard
Ayer do.

He had left Ayer in the desert, with a group
of hiking phenomenalist philosophers,
each trying to receive a “sense datum”
of a big pool of water that, Ayer said,
wasn’t really there. This had puzzled Peter.

He had thought,
when you hopped towards water,
you could drink it.
After rain, it was what he’d seen
the outback wallabies do.

Ayer’d said:
gaining a sense impression of seeing water
was an “optical illusion”
that people in deserts sometimes had.
It happened on hot days
when the sun was shimmering on the sand.
He has described groups of people, in desert,
who think they are seeing water,
& there is no water there;
they are correct
in perceiving something,
but deluded
in what they think it is . . .
Peter’d hoped they were carrying
big pouches of water with them.
He has not seen Ayer since . . .

The soft voice in the dark space
is still talking to itself: Joshua, are you
being punished
for having fifteen wives?
Or, for building this big house
with the top windows shaped like onions?

He’d not wanted a house for them
that looked like the others around it –
houses, mostly, of Arabs,
who went to mosques to pray.

Had he built a needle-spire on top
it might have looked
like a Mormon Church.
They’d not wanted
to draw . . .

such false attention . . . to themselves . . .
in Baghdad, while they stayed . . .

yet needed a cool house, for a hot place.

The pale, whitish-green-tinted window-glass
was anti-glare, locally made . . .

He'd planned
the high dome roof,
to span an unused sunless room,
& give them cool
beneath it – the windows,
to catch the breeze.

The onion . . . a simple food object . . .
How could it
've cost so much –
few labour-intensive lead strips (unlike stained glass)
the design
mostly done in weather-proof paint?

Coming in, Peter'd noted
the small "onions" inside the bigger one,
& puzzled about them.
In the past, he's not
been overly fond
of onions. He is trying
to overcome
his dislike . . .
From the outside,
he'd seen fine lines in a deeper green
curving up each small "onion", to the top
where there was a slim
darker green stalk.
It's the memory of the smell that makes him tremble.
These "onions" have no smell.

He's been reading his book
on the "Philosophy of the East",
& wonders if Joshua knows
in some accounts of Daoism (& Buddhism)
the onion's used as a m e t a p h o r
for the i n s u b s t a n t i a l i t y
of human bodies . . .
Joshua has begun rummaging,
making paper rustling sounds, looking for his passport
& those of his fifteen wives. They did not
take their passports with them, he discovers,
pulling one passport after another
out of a slim black case.

He has travelled with his wives “disguised”
as “sisters”, out of Utah.
At first, the sixteen Smiths ’d been looking for the place
where “the Bible’s Abraham” had lived.
Peter remembers the “cradle of civilisation”,
ancient Mesopotamia,
’s been linked to the “Garden of Eden” myth,
& that the name, “Abraham”,
was connected to this site. Peter, who has been studying widely,
is in Baghdad to collect data
for a rabbit History of Philosophers, though he has not,
yet, received authorization from Cambridge University,
for his proposed “research”,
nor reached Baghdad University, to do it . . .
due to “war” . . .
Was Abraham a philosopher? he asks Joshua, eagerly. Joshua
does not seem to hear.
He had two wives, he murmurs,
so, there is a precedent
for plural marriage . . .

It seems the sixteen Smiths
’ve also been searching for
“The Divine Authorization”
inscribed on two golden plates.

There were other authorizations, Joshua mutters
given to Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, & Solomon.
Perhaps he is secretly hoping
to find some reference
to the Joshua Smiths? . . .

Peter thinks Joshua’s U.S. leave-taking
was, perhaps . . . a trifle late.
He’s read, on the official website
of the Church of Jesus Christ
of the Latter-day Saints,
that it is o n e h u n d r e d
& t h i r t e e n y e a r s
since President Wilford Woodruff
advised that the practice of plural marriage
should cease . . .
furthermore, that, in nineteen ninety-eight,
Joshua would likely have been
excommunicated from the Mormon Church,
& in violation of the “civil law”
of the United States, a virtual outlaw, had he stayed.

Peter has looked up “mirage”
since he left Ayer. He wonders if the plates

might be some kind of “mind’s illusion”,
shimmering gold in humans’ heads,
comparable, perhaps to . . .
creating “illusory water” for them,
as the sun seems to,
shining shiftily
in desert,
on sand?

Outside, in the moonlight, he can see the bats,
swooping out of what’s left of the date palm’s crown.
Though,
from where he squats,
on the uneven floor,
he cannot see
the small high “onion” windows, he suspects
the bats are flitting in & out up there.
They do not look at all
like the Sydney fruit bats he has watched.
He has read, in Bats of the World,
. . . some bats eat fish, birds, other bats . . .
or frogs. Perhaps these Baghdad bats
are catching moths? They do not tell. They make no sound.
All Peter can hear is the quiet voice of Joshua Smith
telling himself, in bits,
the “story” of how he came to be
where he is now.

Joshua has always believed the plates are real,
that they contain
the prophecy of a “primitive American”,
named “Mormon”, who buried them
at Palmyra, in New York state, in A.D.
eight hundred & twenty-seven –
a thousand years before
Joseph Smith
dug them out;
Joseph Smith
was led to them
“by revelation”. It’s rumoured
the plates, which’ve been . . . in hiding . . .
for one hundred & seventy-odd years
have, comparatively recently,
been re-discovered
under the bomb-crumbles
of Baghdad.

Joseph Smith, it seems,
was the only human
who had
“insider” knowledge

of the one-thousand-year-dead
language, & so,
was uniquely able
to “translate”,
“Mormon’s words”,
from the plates into plain,
nineteenth century
“American English”.

Is a language
known only to one person
a language at all?;
Peter remembers
Wittgenstein, pacing restlessly
in his study at Cambridge, asking
for clarifying objections,
counter-arguments, from his students.
He feels sure
Wittgenstein would say
that it was not.

Joshua has one date,
left, to eat.
He eats it.
He believes in “the simple life”.
Abruptly he heads off, barefoot, into the
now day-lit Baghdad streets, to look for any
of his fifteen wives.

Peter wanders off, stopping, to sniff
at empty doorways – the “burrow” leads back
to Joshua’s many-roomed, main house. All
the kitchen cupboards are open,
with nothing inside. He hopes
Joshua will return,
perhaps with some spare
ears of wild green barley – or carrots . . .
He is dreaming
of eating autumn grass
with the Flowerbed Rabbit
when he falls asleep.

They

They use a pronoun called I
all the time. It seems to hop around
with them.

But you can't see it properly
not all of it. Not like you can see
ears or whiskers,
or paw or a sun shadow.

This is what Peter tells the flowerbed rabbit
who lives deep in dark leaves
that grow straight to a sky of apple-red flowers.
She can't read.

He shows her the straight line
her paw scraped
on the rained-on damp
green-growing ground: that's "I"; he puts
two short, stiff twigs – one each – same length –
at the line's
head & foot: that's their
Capital I. But it doesn't MOOOVE,
she objects: those twigs, that scrape
will NEVER hop.
Peter's ears twitch – but he has to agree. Goes on.
Struggles – how to explain: "I's written representation"?

It's a picture,
he says at last, it's a stand-for
what lives in each of them, it's common
to all of THEM – as the earth beneath our paws
is common to all of us (including them)
who run, hop, walk,
fall, lie, or die on it.
She doesn't know what die is. It's a word,
he says, like I is: nobody knows what it's like
inside it.
I die, you singular die, he dies, she dies, it dies,
You plural die, we die, they die –

He's given her a lecture
when all he wanted to do
was follow the white
bobs of her tail
disappearing
into the scarlet flowers.

JAS H. DUKE

1939–1992

Jas Heriot Duke (1939–1992) was a cult figure in the Australian performance poetry scene. He worked much of his life in Melbourne Board of Works and began writing poetry in 1966. He was influenced by Dada, Expressionism and experimental movements. He writes "I started performing poems as a timid person with a stutter but the spirit of the times soon converted me into a bellowing bull."

Jas H. Duke was born in Ballarat, Australia in 1939. Son of two schoolteachers, Irish-Scottish ancestors. His family moved to Melbourne in the 1950s.

He worked as a draftsman/ a laboratory assistant/ a technical writer and dreamed of becoming a chess champion (didn't quite make it). As a substitute he read every book that he could find.

In the 60's he became an Anarchist. Wrote short stories, and was desperately looking for a way to break-out! Went to England via the U S of A, where he circulated in the politico-psychedelic underground. In England he sought the comradeship of Freedom Press; met Ted Kavanagh, Cohn Bendit, Yoko Ono, and Raoul Hausmann. Jas became a political activist, and an actor who appeared in many underground movies by filmmaker Jeff Keen.

Jas came back to Australia in the early 70's. He published a surreal novel *Destiny Wood* printed in 1978, which includes poetry translated from the German, and a section of Concrete poems. He became an active member of Collective Effort Press, where he was involved in many small press publications, including the groundbreaking 925 a poetry magazine, for the workers, by the workers, about the workers work.

Jas was also involved in the first Visual Poetry Anthology of Australia *Missing Forms* published in 1981 by Collective Effort Press.

His poetry reading performances were memorable. They included: sound poems, lyric poems, narrative poems, the satirical, the absurd the political . . . his range was immense. Sometimes he would tear out a page of poetry and eat it while reciting a poem, or, sometimes he would scream out D A D A! in various intensities. His energy and commitment to poetry would shock and re-awaken his audience.

Jas discovered visual and sound poetry, along with the Dada movement in the 60's. He was initially influenced by R. Hausmann and K Schwitters, but found Letraset (and similar products) to be a liberating force, one of anarchic dynamism.

Jas's last book, *Poems of War and Peace* was published in 1989 by Collective Effort Press.

On 19 June 1992, Jas died of a massive heart attack brought on by a broken bone that shattered when he slipped and fell over a concrete step.

H.O., friend and confidant of long standing, and a Collective Effort Press member, is preparing a posthumous collection of the Melbourne Anarchist poet Jas H. Duke entitled *Poems of Life & Death*.

Solidarity Explained

When the axe first came into the forest
the trees said ‘The handle is one of us’.

Class Consciousness

Class consciousness is when you know which side of the fence you are on.
Class analysis is when you know who is there with you.

Alekhine and Junge at Prague

In the year 1942
there was a chess tournament in Prague
nominally to honour the veteran Czech master Oldrich Duras (born 1882)
in 1942 Prague was in the Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia
ruled by Reich-Protector Reinhard Heydrich
second in command of the SS
Hitler wished to spread the message
that "*normal conditions*" prevailed throughout his Empire
so sporting events were encouraged
provided the right people competed
and the right people won

It was an all-play-all event with 12 players
there were the Czechs Foltys, Opocensky, Zita, Kottenauer, Rejfir, and
Hromadka
there were two Germans, the veteran Sämisch and the youngster Junge
and the World Champion, Alexander Alekhine
a Russian emigre who had settled in France
where he deserted his Russian wife and married a wealthy American
a chess player of tremendous ability
famed for the depth of his thought and his commitment to the game
Alekhine the player evoked universal admiration
but Alekhine the man often aroused hostility

The outbreak of war found Alekhine in Argentina
competing in the Chess Olympiad
this was a team event
Germany narrowly won from Poland
as Poland was eliminated from the map
the German and Polish masters stayed in South America
Alekhine did not
he returned to France and joined the French Army
on the French capitulation he was demobilised
he went to Portugal for a time
then returned to France
he mingled with the Nazi conquerors
played in their tournaments
wrote articles for their newspapers
where he stated that only "*Aryans*"
could "*play chess artistically*"
(to prove this point
the SS murdered the Jewish masters
Landau of Holland, Wolf of Austria, and Przepiorka of Poland)
Alekhine was brusque and rude and often drunk
but he was still Champion of the World.

Klaus Junge was the Champion of Germany

he was 19 years old
the greatest German player since Lasker and Tarrasch
born in Chile of German parents
blond, blue-eyed, handsome and sensitive
liked by all who knew him
for years German chess had floundered
despite lavish state assistance
the victorious team in Argentina had included two Austrians
(Eliskases and Becker)
made German by the march of conquest
but now Germany had a genuine grandmaster
and he was not a Jew

Junge started brilliantly
he won game after game
Alekhine had no losses
but he drew with Foltys, Zita and Rejfir
Junge surged ahead
there were murmurings among the Czech spectators
they did not see Alekhine as a drunken lout
in favour with Hitler
but instead
"a Slav like us"
during the tournament
the Russians began the offensive
designed to cut off the German Army besieging Stalingrad
rumours of this had reached Prague
Slavs advanced and Germans retreated
and the Czech Resistance
killed Reinhard Heydrich in a bombing attack
which in turn led to the murder of about 10,000 Czechs
all *"Slavs like us"*
Junge drew some games
Alekhine could still catch up

The last round was reached
neither Junge nor Alekhine had lost
but Junge had less draws and more wins
he led by a whole point
they still had to play each other
if Alekhine won they would be level

Alekhine had White
he played the Catalan System
a tense position was reached
Junge had a slight advantage
Alekhine dipped into his bottomless bag of tricks
found something
sacrificed the exchange (Rook for Bishop)
great complications ensued
Junge lost his way

made a less than the best move
and Alekhine overwhelmed him

So they finished level
but Alekhine had won their individual game
so the spectators
and the world
regarded it as another Alekhine triumph
he won thought the Czechs
he won
and he is a Slav like us

The German fronts gave way at Stalingrad and Tunis
there were mass surrenders
Hamburg collapsed under a hail of bombs
the U-Boats in the Atlantic were mastered
there was less interest in Hitler-sponsored chess tournaments
Hitler was going to lose the war

Junge was inducted into the German Army
there were no soft options for him
he was killed in battle in April 1945
still fighting for Hitler
Alekhine went to Spain in 1943
he remained on the Iberian peninsula for 3 years
living in cheap hotels, giving chess lessons, playing exhibition matches
there was intense feeling in France about "*collaborators*"
he thought it dangerous to return

But he was still World Champion
the USSR sent in a formal challenge for its leading player
Mikhail Botvinnik
the match was to be played in London
Alekhine accepted
he needed money to stay alive
but before the match could start
he died

Eventually a Championship Tournament was arranged
and this was won by Botvinnik
in the years after Alekhine's death
master chess was dominated
by citizens of the USSR

In the circumstances at Prague
Alekhine and Junge could no longer be individuals and chess players
(the pleasant boy and the wily veteran)
the insanity of the Hitler regime
turned them both into soldiers
the Czech spectators thought the right man won
do you think that they were right?

Alekhine-Junge Prague 1942

- 1 *P-Q4, P-Q4*
- 2 *P-QB4, P-K3*
- 3 *N-KB3, N-KB3*
- 4 *P-KN3, PxP*
- 5 *Q-R4+, QN-Q2*
- 6 *B-N2, P-QR3*
- 7 *QxBP, P-QN4*
- 8 *Q-B6, R-QN1*
- 9 *O-O, B-N2*
- 10 *Q-B2, P-B4*
- 11 *P-QR4, BxN*
- 12 *BxB, PxQP*
- 13 *PxP, PxP*
- 14 *R-Q1, Q-N3*
- 15 *N-Q2, P-K4*
- 16 *N-N3, N-B4*
- 17 *NxN, BxN*
- 18 *R-R6, QxR*
- 19 *QxB, Q-K3*
- 20 *B-B6+, N-Q2*
- 21 *BxN+, KxB*
- 22 *Q-R7+, K-B3 (would K-Q3 draw?)*
- 23 *B-Q2, KR-QB1*
- 24 *P-K4, Q-N6*
- 25 *R-R1, P-N5*
- 26 *R-R6+, K-N4*
- 27 *R-R5+, K-B3*
- 28 *Q-B5+-, K-Q2*
- 29 *R-R7+, RESIGNS*

When I Was Young

When I was young

I thought I knew everything

now I know everything.

When I was young I thought there was an explanation for everything

Now I know there's an explanation for every explanation.

When I was young

I thought there was a battle between style and content,

Now I know that the content of every style depends on the style of every content.

Once I thought that life was a mystery

Now I know that the only mystery was why I thought it was a mystery.

Once I thought

I was destined to do great things

Now I know that the great things I was destined to do
failed to wait for me to do them.

Shit Poem

I'm in the shit business
I work for the sewerage depatment
I analyse experiments
I draw graphs and flow charts
and conclusions
today I was sitting at my desk
trying to explain
the dissolved air flotation process
where streams of little bubbles are released
into a tank full of sewerage
to float the suspended solids up to the surface
to be skimmed off
but what I was really thinking about
was lunchtime
the canteen cook
caters to the ethnic multitudes
by putting on Italian eats most days
I was thinking of ravioli
with meat sauce
but I was writing things like
"The sludge produced by this process
is grey-brown in colour
and does not produce
offensive odours
provided anaerobic conditions
can be prevented"
the sludge is really composed of
my used ravioli
and the Boss's used steak
and your used hamburger
and the vegetarian's used brown rice
all mixed up together
and when it gets in this state
no one wants to know about it
except me
I don't find shit offensive
most people do
they can'y wait to push the button
or pull the chain or something
and then they think the shit has vanished
into the centre of the earth
it hasn't really
it just floats up somewhere else
However
it's all biodegradable
I reckon most people think
that shit is the most deadly poison

on the face of the earth
they'd rather face ten tons of plutonium
than half a bucket of shit
even their own
no curse in the English Language
is complete
without "shit" included in it somewhere
lunchtime arrived
I ate my ravioli
I had a shit
it was brown in colour
I felt a lot better

GEOFF PAGE

b. 1940

Geoff Page was born in Grafton, New South Wales on 7 July 1940, into a family with a long connection with the Clarence River district. His grandfather, Sir Earle Page, was the founder of the Country Party, now the National Party, though Page himself has taken the opposite approach to politics, supporting the Labor Party. He attended the Armidale School and then completed an Arts degree at the University of New England. In 1964 he moved to Canberra where he taught English and History in local schools. He was in charge of the English Department at Narrabundah College from 1974 until his retirement in 2001.

Page's first collection of poems appeared in 1971, as *Two Poets*, a small volume in UQP's Paperback Poets Series shared with fellow poet Phillip Roberts. *Smalltown Memorials* (1975) and *Collecting the Weather* (1978) established many of Page's continuing preoccupations, especially with history, both the history of his own family and Australian history more generally, with a particular emphasis on the violence and loss incurred through wars and the destruction of Aborigines and their culture following European settlement. To date, Page has published more than twenty collections, as well as two verse novels and *Lawrie and Shirley, The Final Cadenza: a movie in verse* (2006). *Darker and Lighter* (2001) won the Grace Leven Poetry Prize for that year. A *Selected Poems* appeared in 1991.

Page has also been very active as an anthologist, critic and reviewer, his many publications doing much to promote Australian poetry, and poetry more generally. They include *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Australian Poetry* (1995), *80 Great Poems from Chaucer to Now* (2006) and *60 Classic Australian Poems* (2009).

While best-known as a poet and critic, Page has also published two novels as well as a musical biography, *Bernie McGann: A Life in Jazz* (1997), interviewed a wide range of jazz musicians for the National Film and Sound Archive, and written plays for radio, television and the stage. He has taken part in poetry readings, seminars and conferences in Australia, China, Europe, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States. He won the Robert Harris Poetry Prize in both 1994 and 1996 and the ACT Poetry Award in 2004. In 2001 he received the Patrick White Award and in 2006 the FAW Christopher Brennan Award.

Jazz/Poet

he scrawled
a sudden
sentence in
the air

violent yet
articulate

I snatched
a phrase

and took
it home
to work on

but
by dawn

it was
dead

For William Carlos Williams

As with
the newborn
of Rutherford

you took
life's drifting scraps
by the feet

with worn hands
slapped them
into breath

and smiled
to hear them bawl
so wisely.

Grand Remonstrance

So much she never
could abide

so much always
to resent

the sulkiness
of mother's teats

the boy next door
astride her scooter

a teacher's random
sudden justice

the tardy flowering
of her breasts

the unfair cycles
of the moon

the owl's eye
of Mr Sims

over her shoulder
as she typed

the gossip that stopped
as she drew near it

the vague delays
of a fiancé

leaning on
the town's opinion

the wedding with relatives
thrice-removed

the uninvited
winsome babies

the hardwon 13-
carat ring

the three-day honey-
moon and then

suddenly
her own two children

the martyrdom
of 3 a.m.

the thoughtless toys
and dirty curtains

smears across
the morning light

the silences
that each child kept

seeking to
outlast her own

the son who sideslipped
out of school

the daughter year
by year resuming

her mother's skin
the husband too

his daily leavepass
to the world

the false compliance
of his slippers

and then the last
two years in bed

unvisited
and fingering

the soiled card-index
in her head

of grievance going
decades back

to taunts and snubs
in corridors

snideness in
the vivid playground

and so to a slab
of immaculate granite

the lengthening rancour
of the grave

six feet down
and now at last

the stunning
equity of death.

Christ at Gallipoli

*This synod is convinced that the forces
of the Allies are being used of God to
vindicate the rights of the weak and to
maintain the moral order of the world.
Anglican Synod, Melbourne, 1916.*

Bit weird at first,
That starey look in the eyes,
The hair down past his shoulders,
But after a go with the ship's barber,
A sea-water shower and the old slouch hat
Across his ears, he started to look the part.
Took him a while to get the way
A bayonet fits the old Lee-Enfield,
But going in on the boats
He looked calmer than any of us,
Just gazing in over the swell
Where the cliffs looked black against the sky.
When we hit he fairly raced in through the waves,
Then up the beach, swerving like a full-back at the end
When the Turks'd really got on to us.
Time we all caught up,
He was off like a flash, up the cliffs,
After his first machine gun.
He'd done for three Turks when we got there,
The fourth was a gibbering mess.
Seeing him wave that blood-red bayonet,
I reckoned we were glad
To have him on the side.

Transcendental

Transcendental,
she said. Bells
and sandals. Unpersuaded,
I weather a three day stay
and set her on the bus
then walk back through the
frost-clear streets of Sunday morning.
Young trees, clean-limbed
and straight from concrete,
rise to catch the sun.
In the city square
is nothing else
but slanting light
and the trees that hold it;
and the only sound, the cries
of seagulls, sailing
in the space between
white buildings.
By now her bus
is riding awakening paddocks;
and here, a hundred miles
off-course, seagulls
wheeling in the frosty air
complete the argument.

A dream of 1943

They have no wish to
hide themselves;
they're happy in their work.

One I see, fresh out from town,
is slick with soap and
splashed Cologne.

The others rub him on the ears
(it's all in monochrome)
tousling his hair and joking

men and women both,
the female faces round as plates,
the men more horse-like

in their features.
I'm free, it seems, to walk around.
The slaughter is industrial

and on the other side of sound.

Two for Peter Porter

1. Basso Continuo

J.S. Bach and F.J. Haydn;
Wolfgang Amadeus, too ...
Why was their music so serene,
those strings all soaring, right on cue?

They held almost a century
of Europe in a sort of stasis,
the airiness of metaphysics
stored inside the violin cases.

A war or two at the beginning
and something wilder at the end
but, in between, the great musicians
implied that borders would not bend,

that roads were free of all banditti,
that Voltaire had no fight with God.
They hoped their pasty dukes and princes
would keep on giving them the nod

as court composers, Kappellmeisters,
prodigies on harpsichord,
masters of the upward strings.
Their many masses praised the Lord

and also all the minor ones
whose powers the Christian one approved
Special trumpets sang their advents
and notably improved their mood

since patrons pay for reassurance.
One likes one's age to be serene ... as strings play on in
counterpoint
dreaming of the guillotine.

2. Il Stupendo

How inadequate they seem,
each purple-sheened superlative!
If one considers them too hard
they've clearly not got much to give.

'Impressive' means just 'leaves a mark',
a footprint on an empty beach;
'Remarkable' says very little;

‘remarks’ are hardly out of reach.

‘Notable’ does not quite do it—
I ‘note’ I’ve not done much today.
For ‘Stunning’ to become ‘Impressive’
it needs to wear a negligée.

‘Outstanding’ merely tells one how
the competition all fell short.
‘Brilliant’ is a trick of light,
evanescent as a thought.

‘Beautiful’ is ‘in the eye’;
‘Transcendent’ calls for disbelief.
‘Exemplary’ smells of discipline.
‘Eternal’ can be rather brief.

‘Prodigious’ comes from ‘prodigy’,
a small boy typing way too fast.
‘Perfect’ is impossible.
‘Sublime’ is heavy with its past.

With ‘Peerless’ and ‘Pre-eminent’
one needs to read the also-rans.
How wearying they’ve all become,
the bigger-, better-, bolder-thans!

Or so I am inclined to think.
Superlatives no longer sing—
though synonyms for ‘Mediocre’
are, of course, another thing.

How Not to be a Refugee

Don't try too hard in trade or commerce
Or be a prodigy in music.
Don't have different eyes or nose.
Have no truck with lesser gods.
Don't stand close to higher-ups,
The home-grown --- or the just-arrived,
Unfurling their intentions.
Don't ride about collecting debts.
Don't be too small or risk a crushing,
Don't be too big and spook the khan.
Avoid mistakes when choosing parents.
Be careful with their shade and size.
By following these simple rules,
You'll get to stay at home --- alive.

2013

GEOFFREY LEHMANN

b. 1940

Geoffrey Lehmann was born in Sydney on 28 June 1940 and spent his early childhood at McMahon's Point on the northern side of Sydney Harbour. He attended the Sydney Church of England Boys' Grammar School before continuing on to the University of Sydney. He completed a combined degree in Arts and Law, graduating in 1963. During this time he met fellow poet, then also a student, Les Murray, with whom he coedited the university magazines *Arna* and *Hermes*. During this time he was also associated with the Sydney Push.

After graduating, Lehmann practised as a solicitor, becoming a partner with C. R. Willcox. He also lectured in law and taxation at the University of New South Wales. He later became a partner in the international accounting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers. In addition to his poetry, Lehmann has written a novel and edited several anthologies of Australian poetry.

Lehmann's first volume of poetry *The Ilex Tree* (1965), published jointly with Les Murray, won the Grace Leven Poetry Prize. Since then he has published seven further collections of poetry, as well as a *Selected Poems* (1976) and a *Collected Poems* (1997) that won for Lehmann his third Grace Leven Poetry Prize. The second had arrived in 1981 for *Nero's Poems: Translations of the Public and Private Poems of the Emperor Nero*. Here Lehmann uses the persona of the Roman emperor Nero as a means to satirise contemporary society, including that of Sydney. In his earlier long poem, *Ross' Poems* (1978), he employs the voice of an Australian farmer to explore the ideas of family and community. *Spring Forest* (1992) repeats and expands this material. Lehmann has also written telling and often amusing poetry about his family and family life in general.

The Car-ride to Melbourne

(a wedding gift for Rodney and Dagnija Madgwick)

Pounding the miles behind, black bushlands rushing
And whispering past, our VW motor kicking
And guiding us down the dark flying river
Of road, a homestead's warm lights, shadowy paddocks,
A darkened service station, feeding cows,
A hill, a bridge, gulped by seesawing miles,
A steak devoured at a bustling roadside café,
Mediocre meat delicious through youth and distance,
As travellers we drank deep of life and future,
You bound for Dagnija, known and loved, and I
Excited by an unknown, untried city.
(In fact this time the city yielded little,
But what I value was the hope, the journey.)
Travelling through shifts of weather, gusts of mist
Blowing and breaking around us, then eerie clearness,
Dust roaring from gravel roads, a sprinkle of rain,
Our windscreen wipers washing a smear of stars,
And always fear, the fear of death, the blow-out
Or slight misjudgment which might catapult
Us into darkness, bodies flung against trees
Or amongst clay and long grass brushed by headlights.
We saw two cars blazing beside the road,
Black shells licked by a billowing inferno.
Distance booming, our bubble of steel and glass
Journeying through racing shadows, loping curves,
A pine against the moon, desolate dew,
Trees passing, singsong mirror for our dreams,
Terror gripping the steering wheel vibrating
With the relentless rolling of the road,
A pill swallowed against insidious sleep ...
Such journeys heighten consciousness, expand
Our lungs, sharpen our loves and revive old myths
Of travellers carrying a candle through the snow.
The meaning which our journey had for you
Gave meaning, destination to me also.

And at the end swinging through lyrical pastures
At dawn, sheep tawny in the silent sunrise,
Insects thudding like treacle on the windscreen,
Fluttering in the first arias of light,
Then dipping into Melbourne, quiet and cloudy,
A crumbling terrace, hollyhocks in Carlton,
Battering upon the door, shaking the house
Awake and Dagnija coming out soft-footed
Smiling, still vague with sleep embracing you.

A breakfast sweet with half a thousand miles,
Then sleep filched in a large white unreal bedroom,
Air tapping blinds, the early morning stirring,
And as we slept our minds still journeyed on.

The Trip to Bunyah

(a letter for Les Murray)

Our Landrover jolting and banging over country roads
In a night of mist and stillness, fields of maize,
Foliage ripped past, our lonely headlights fumbling
Through moonlight, white dust, gum-trees, Hawkesbury country,
(Sleep snatched, head shaken against drumming metal)
So by crumbling, forgotten roads we travelled through valleys.
Night hills passing were shifting dream perspectives.
Then the mirror-smooth coastal highway, bitumen
As sleek as pumice, shallow undulations
Through emptier landscape, dead trees, salt-grey scrub
Brought us at last to the wrench, the bumpy turn-off
Into the Murray country, gentle valleys
Of sheltered creeks, grass tussocks, rain-scoured rocks,
A cup of tea at midnight, your dad Cecil
Barking out greetings, fixing up the bedding.
Darkness shovelled heavy loam in our heads,
Digging us deeper into paddocks of sleep.

Next day you opened up the book of your childhood
And led us through pages stained with streams and horses,
Fields which we ran through scattering burning matches,
Scrub shrieking into flames, birds in the rush
Of fluttering ash and brown haze to the sky
Darting on life that scurried from burning fissures.
Fresh greenness would come from burning off, you said,
Reading the fine-grained lines of your country's hand,
Explaining to us how hawks patrol the hill-tops,
Nesting among the high and windy places,
How cows are man-shy, foxes cough at night,
And land requires three generations to tame it.
Your words made a general blur jump into focus,
Showed trees and ridges with sharp glittering edges,
Turned landscape into mandscape, soil to cherish,
And on this sleeping breast of hills and grasslands,
Darkening and brightening with the moods of clouds,
Rosellas dropped like fruit before your rifle.

“Quiet, Merlin sleeps here in this wood,” you said,
Standing in a quiet grove of paperbarks,
A thousand trunks of dead skin, tattered, feathery,
Rags of bark fallen on the ground like kapok.
Tearing a strip of muslin from a trunk
I found a monstrous centipede and ran.

We climbed and ranged amongst your childhood's hills

Vast soft things with their eerie wind-picked summits,
Brief plateaus caked with chunks of cow-dung hardening
In winter sunlight into khaki rocks,
And saw your forefathers' country far below,
Stretching for miles, now shrunk to a few fields,
Land gambled off to strangers, vanished homesteads,
A pine, a crumbling tennis court in a paddock.
And then when darkness snapped its frosty fingers
In night air fresh from the hills we heard the stories
Of country dances, broken violins,
And voices which the countryman can hear,
Whispers inaudible to city people,
But speaking death or illness to the ear
Close to the earth, attuned to its vibrations,
Memories licked into shape like cigarette papers,
Rubbed in the hand beneath the lens of night,
Blowing up the chimney, smoke amongst the stars.
Years late, I send this note about our journey,
Water I have stored in a cool place in my mind.

Song for Past Midnight

The calico-pale paddocks through the window
Are glazed in stillness, two o'clock, the hour
Of dew and frost, stiff leaves, inert houses.
Moving amongst shadows of furniture
I drink a glass of water in the dark.
Deep in the night dark shapes of cows are feeding.

JOHN TRANTER

b. 1943

John Tranter was born in Cooma, New South Wales, in 1943. His father, Fred Tranter, taught at a one-teacher school in the village of Bredbo, 36kms north of Cooma; his mother had two teenage children from a previous marriage. When he was about four years old the family moved to the town of Moruya, on the New South Wales south coast, where his father taught at a large public school before resigning to take up farming and establish a soft-drink factory. Tranter did well enough in his Intermediate Certificate exams in 1957 to gain a place at Hurlstone Agricultural High School, a selective state farm on the south-west outskirts of Sydney. Although he ultimately failed Agriculture in his Leaving Certificate exams in 1960, he did attain an honours pass in English. A teacher encouraged him to begin writing poetry, and one of the first two poems he wrote won a prize in the school's annual magazine.

In 1961 he matriculated to the University of Sydney on a Commonwealth Scholarship to study Architecture, but withdrew from the course before the end of the year and in 1962 commenced an Arts degree. While studying Arts he contributed to the student weekly newspaper *Honi Soit* and became friends with its then editor Bob Ellis. He was again unsuccessful in his studies, however, and dropped out at the end of 1962. He worked in various casual jobs for the next few years, before travelling to England by ship in 1966 and eventually finding work there as a mail van driver in London. With his partner Lyn Grady, he returned to Australia in 1967, after travelling overland through France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The couple married in March 1968.

Tranter began publishing poetry in Australian literary journals and poetry magazines from the mid-1960s, and wrote with increased energy after his return to Australia in 1967, his work appearing regularly in *Poetry Australia* magazine among others. In 1969 he established his own magazine, *Transit New Poetry*, which lasted only two issues before folding—this was the first of a number of poetry publishing ventures Tranter would be involved in. He decided to return to the University of Sydney, initially studying at night while working in the printing department of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), then, after securing a Teacher's College scholarship, as a full-time student. His first poetry collection, *Parallax and other poems*, was published as a special issue of *Poetry Australia* in June 1970.

In 1971 he was appointed as an editor at the Singapore branch of the publishers Angus and Robertson, a position he retained until 1973. On returning to Australia he took up a job with the ABC's Radio Drama and Features department, beginning a long association with the ABC as a producer and broadcaster. From 1975–1977 he worked at the ABC's Brisbane studios, returning to Sydney in 1977. With Jan Garrett, he developed the weekly book review program 'Books and Writing,' which ran from 1975 until 2006. In addition to his work at the ABC, he worked for SBS television (1981–1986) and as a teacher and lecturer at various tertiary institutions. In the 1980s Tranter established the small press *Transit New Poetry*, publishing several collections by Australian poets including Gig Ryan and John Forbes.

Since 1970 Tranter has published some twenty poetry collections. His work has regularly appeared in Australian and international literary journals, and has been

widely anthologised. His books have won a number of major Australian literary awards: *Under Berlin* (1988) won both the Grace Leven prize and the Kenneth Slessor prize, *At the Florida* won the Age Dinny O'Hearn prize (1993), and *Urban Myths: 210 poems: new and selected* (2006), won the Kenneth Slessor prize, the C. J. Dennis prize, the John Bray award, and the South Australian Premier's award. He has been the recipient of a number of literary grants and senior writing fellowships, including writer-in-residence positions at Rollins College in Florida (1992) and in the English Faculty at Cambridge University (2001). He has travelled widely, and made regular reading tours to the USA, the UK and Europe throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Regarded as one of the leading 'Generation of '68' poets, Tranter's work has been influenced by the New York School of poets (ca.1950s–1960s), as well as the French symboliste poets of the nineteenth century. His poems sometimes employ experimental techniques, and often involve witty and cosmopolitan reflections on modern urban life. He has also been active as a literary critic and, particularly, as an editor, including of a posthumous selection of Martin Johnson's poetry and prose (1993), and the anthologies *The New Australian Poetry* (1979), the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (with Philip Mead, 1991), and *The Best Australian Poetry 2007* (2007). In 1997 he founded the highly regarded online poetry magazine *Jacket*, which he continues to edit and publish. With his wife Lyn, a successful literary agent, he lives in the Sydney harbourside suburb of Balmain.

Since the late 1960s, John Tranter has been the established agent provocateur of Australian poetry. Tranter's work has been seen variously as part (if not instigator) of a late-blooming Australian Modernism, an Australian response to Modernism and so a form of postmodernism, and, at its most aggressive, a similar response to postmodernism ('post-postmodernism?' as Australian poet John Kinsella puts it). In the critical and conceptual determining and redetermining of Australian poetry, Tranter has been a vitalising and invigorating force. As a poet, he has produced some of the most influential and distinctive works in Australian poetry (poems such as 'Lufthansa', 'Debby and Co.' are classics). As an editor and a critic, he has generously and consistently encouraged the development of Australian poetry in an international context, energising and demanding critical debate and an ongoing evaluation of the place of poetry in the contemporary context of mass-media communication and the emergence of a globalised technological culture.

Tranter is one of the great stylists of Australian poetry, a disciplined perfectionist. Throughout his career, he has broken down and reconstructed his poetic, abandoning – with rigour and ironic detachment – his poetry to a constant state of revolution and reinvention. His poems – be they closely wrought formal inventions or algebraically cut (-up) reinventions – are state of the art, models of design and form. Densely ironic, constantly playful, Tranter's work breaks language open to find the modern world below, and only then to break that modernity open to find it constructed and complicated by the warping intricacies of language. Tranter's parody and satire, of the presumptions and forms of poetry, couple with an equally biting social commentary, where an often isolated voice drifts, more fatigued than perplexed, by the deluge of the contemporary in its various forms: the rush and babble, the not quite broken lives, the migraines, sundowners, cars, migrants, through to the distant luminescence of America that underwrites so much of it. A peculiar irony of Tranter's longevity and gifts, is that, having set out to break away from the formalism of the antecedent generation (represented by poets such as A.D.

Hope), inspired early on by the likes of Rimbaud and, more closely, the freeing up of poetry in America presented in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*, Tranter has become one of the most skilled formalists in Australian poetry.

His work is a dangerous cocktail of pastiche, subtlety and inversion, acute and acerbic observation detailing and deploying the beautiful trap of language. Tranter once observed:

Language is an echo of our need to communicate, which is why it exists. I've never been interested in going totally beyond meaning, because there's no point in writing. That's not what poems are about, you might as well publish a leaf or a rock. But I am interested in the tensions you get when you go beyond conventionally expected meaning and come back again.

(From: Erica Travers, 'An Interview with John Tranter', *Southerly*, Volume 51, Number 4 (1991): 18

Within Tranter's poetry, Rimbaud's claim that "One must be absolutely modern" is sampled and tested, giving the poetry over to a constant war with the silence and meaninglessness imposed on language and experience by the realities of the Twentieth century; an absolute modernity Rimbaud could not have conceived of through *all* the seasons in hell.

Having begun as a revolutionary with a gift for irony, in close on forty years at the terminal, and with numerous influential poetry collections and two key anthologies of modern Australian poetry (along with the internationally acclaimed *Jacket*) to his credit, Tranter is one of the engines of contemporary Australian poetry and a strong presence on the international stage. For all of that Tranter's work is – as poetry should be – *fun*, very serious, at times eviscerating, fun.

Reader beware! Postmodernism never had it so good!

© Michael Brennan

Memoirs of a Forty-Year-Old Revolutionary

I should say that I'm a wasted thirty-two
with a dropped womb and a taste for alcoholic failures.
But I am thirty-four, plenty of juice between my thighs,
and I have a young boy not at all alcoholic.

I know seven sophistries of revolution, practise none of them.
I do my best to be a tragic figure, but the boy laughs—
not even a whore in the cause, there are no whores here
in the red twilight. Not so much a worker

as a fellow traveller. I have a taste for leather jackets,
hard drink; my father beat me at the age of twelve.
I tell myself not to forget, but that's an old joke.
My wasted hatred filters to a logic of revenge.

The boy is mad on grass, that's his revolution.
Mine is to stay alive. Well, I've been to Laos,
Istanbul, left a trail of blood through Saragossa
that no one followed. The war is ended:

my damage is to stay alive. Perhaps I'm an amusing failure
perhaps I'm a woman, thirty-eight, a tiresome traveller
with a suitcase full of dumb disguises and a book
and phoney memories of Saragossa.

Conversations

*In the house of poetry nothing remains except
that which was written with blood to be listened to with blood.*

Pablo Neruda

1 ['On the rack of the long expected I take back]
'On the rack of the long expected I take back
and electrify ... a fatal disease,' claims Cronstadt,
middle-aged, the drunk poet in the park. 'The Poet
lobs a verbal hand-grenade. The drug explodes, a hot
poppy in the willing flesh.' He is on his knees
scrabbling for his 'Poems'. His fingers
accidentally trigger off a gust of memory.
'It's no good talking about Greek legends
to me! I have an obstinate devotion to life
as it is lived ... I have lived here in the park
through a hundred morbid cycles, the crisis and the loss,
watching the brutal forces eating their way
into the features of old men, sluts, children
fucking in the leafy dark, a landscape built
with dust and vomit. Talk to me of money wasted,
leprosy, how the wine turns bitter in the glass,
but don't bring your book-learning here
and talk about the "spirit of decay".'
So he limps from brothel to asylum
trailing a thin steel shaft, plotting
ruinous conjunctions. Later,
when his latest needle blots out time,
he is up to his bowels in black mud
digging at the roots of the city;
at such a depth of filth can only pray
for the simplest miracles: breath,
coolness, and a rising sun.

2 ['My new experiment, to be heroic.']
'My new experiment, to be heroic.'
Cronstadt can amuse himself with pain,
washing out his guts with poison. On the screen
the automatic rifles' rattling burst
chopped a death salad through the leaves.
Cronstadt approved his own disgust. 'Better to corrupt
nature with each verbal stroke; so does art
destroy life in a frenzy of bad images.'
His new harlot sucks another chocolate mint, confiding:
'Roses, he brought me, something gained...'
more than mutilated feelings. 'The brute!' She lies
that she is hurt, or bad, or wounded.
'Cheeky bitch! Cheek! Cheek!' Her little girl flinched

back, curled on the blanket, weeping at the window
and the rain river sheathing the glass.
I grant him this: he knows the slaughterhouse,
bright scarlet brook of horror, how the red
darkens to amethyst and maroon
and how the flushed and drunken moon drags the truth
from a city, from the bleeding sex,
and how to trade such knowledge to advantage.
Nothing less than the emotions' bribery
and rank corruption of experience would wrench a girl
to such grovelling, white skin and bone
bathed in the television flash and glow
that freezes all that you observe, leaking forth
as the Poem.

3 ['Approach the Poem with no less care than you would]
'Approach the Poem with no less care than you would
a dangerous companion,' was his last remark
as evening sifted down onto the conversation pit.
'A whole career ended,' he would say,
'as though nightmare flickered into light,' as the Poem
sagged into itself
'Sweeping up this trash...' wreckage,
pentameters crushed against the Verb
'More pollution! As though ... night ...'
as though a harsh collections of mouthings
transcended the spittle, the hackneyed breath, trash
from three continents, to burst into the real!
You know the lash of something else, Cronstadt, and
how to utilise the new trick, confessing pain ...
you, touching a nerve, moving closer
black with hate and money, foul with love.
'Somebody has to lose out,' he suggested,
buying up a much-abused virginity
she who would offer no resistance to a gainful trade—
naked willingly, a lover stripped of metaphors—
underwriting only the regret, and that later,
when Cronstadt's craving for a kill had been appeased
in his own transparent way: 'Take a desire, my boy,
and *appease* it!' So he would flay
the remnants of his ill-fitting life
prepared at the morning window washed with light—
the whip, the grin, the teeth, the monkey suit.

4 ['More news from the front,' whispered a friend,]
'More news from the front,' whispered a friend,
wiping the message with a finger in a melting line
across the frosted glass. Cronstadt returns
from the evening assay of concern.
'Few of my suckers left,' a weak smile, 'few
to sip the nectar.' Later, plied with drink

he may condescend to lift the fog
from a scene glowing with cold phosphorus
to reveal the corpse, a friendship
and a lust for meaning. The broken body
much abused in its energy
becomes the new syntax, the new
hairshirt in a lusty weave. The Poem.
'I load the glass with three conceptions,
enough for life. To see, to pluck the rot
and set it growing in a bowl, to explicate. Drink.
The drinks are free.' The glass slopped over with a rag,
the line dissolves into a vista of the street:
some hunched monster approaches in shreds,
claws at the pane that lately held the Poem
in a flux of molten quartz. *'Mon semblable! Pitoyable frère!*
Make him dance, and beg, and give him wine! The hero thus
distils himself ...' But he has pushed the metaphor too far.
The monster breaks the window with a clumsy blow
confronting Cronstadt with a double image of defeat:
the message buried in a heap of shattered glass
and a slab of wet light on the pavement of an empty street.

5 [Taking the air along the boulevard, he airs his view:]
Taking the air along the boulevard, he airs his view:
to make a poem, an act of suicide; to love a woman, worse;
and 'Give up life, my boy, there's nothing in it!'
He's growing old. He stops to have a drink. The alcohol
inflames him to regret. 'So many bitches! And yet, the clay
creates the Work!' Across the road, behind the sunset
in a window, a naked woman saunters through a room.
Down in the street a sports car mutters at the lights.
The city stops. Cronstadt drowns
in the glass, in the rivers of flesh. 'My mind heats up—
over there, the city smoulders on the rim. Red neon
burning in the rain. Night extends its needles
through the brain. And you? When will you prepare yourself
to welcome failure? Your feeble style, emotion's
haberdashery, wasted entertainment, a naive
balance to the good. You claim I dwell too much
on the obscene. It's a way of pitying the suffering mass,
he would profess, breaking his face across the intersections
in the complex mirror. 'Some way of making up a debt.'
And then another drink, and later, weeping: with a dirty rag
he'd wipe his sopping face and try to laugh.
'Many times I have approached the real,
and pushed too hard.' Now it seems at last that he is sickened
with his own destruction. 'My boy, take a good look at me
and see what thirty years of bright living have done:
I've got all the music taped, and a burnt-out freedom,
and no more ammunition in the gun.'

The Seasons

The Seasons—Spring

Jack carefully lowered the needle onto the surface of the spinning vinyl. From somewhere out back came the sound: the Miles Davis quartet playing ‘Autumn Leaves’. It was ages before the track got going—some drum doodle—then it took off like a rocket. But they were dead now, Jack reckoned. Susie had borrowed a red and white check jacket that suited the period, late forties. Jack had brought a rubber turkey, Dinky had invested in a hollow pumpkin with a candle inside. They went through the motions, mouthing the great playwright's words, while a bushel of copper-toned foliage cascaded over their shoulders and whirled around their feet. Maybe if they wished hard enough, Jack thought to himself, maybe they would find themselves seated around a little table out the front of the Café de Flore in—say—September 1953, drinking black coffee and green chartreuse, laughing and arguing about whether Susie should have flirted with that writer at the publisher's party the night before. *Of course she should!* Then the audience went quiet, and the lights dimmed. Ah, how lovely! How rare the bubbles of air, wobbling up to the blue ceiling!

*A baby sparrow
falls to the footpath outside
‘Dirty Girls Revue’.*

The Seasons—Summer

Rodney twined a length of tartan ribbon around the sleigh bells on the reindeer's collar and paused, rubbing his stomach. Why had he ordered a second dozen at the Oyster Bar? He was developing a paunch. The staff had free access to the gym on Tuesdays; why didn't he use it? Tartan—some people call it ‘plaid’. And they call plaits ‘braids’, and they call braid ... That new junior—what was his name? Brad? Chad? He kept himself trim, all right. Tod, that was it! Tod had sipped his chilled frontignac, the glass beaded with moisture, Tod had traced a heart with his fingertip, Tod had glanced at Rodney across the oyster shells with a promise in his eyes—smoky grey eyes, with a glow of blue in the depths. But if he'd flirt with me—Rodney smoothed his toupee—if he'd have me, he'd have anybody, and who wants a slut like that? He felt his mouth pulling down at the corners. *I do, that's who.* He looked out through the plate glass, past the streams of pedestrians. Hyde Park was busy with Christmas shoppers. Wrappers and newspapers blew around their feet. There were lots of Japanese among the crowd, he noticed with pleasure, eating hot dogs and licking ice-cream cones. One old oriental gentleman, his forehead shaded from the fiercesun by a golf cap, was holding up a scrap of paper and reading something he'd written on it to a lady, probably his wife:

*On the path, a snake
fast asleep. High on a branch
a shy morsel sings.*

The Seasons—Autumn

The flowers wilted under the studio lights, and Jerry sweated. His client, the Tokyo Girl Suspenders, wanted the freshest flowers, the juiciest leaves. He ran

around with a little spray can of green paint and a copy of the *TLS*, touching things up. The Polaroids were awful—the emulsion had gone stale, and the model had some disease that made her skin go funny in the heat...whose voice was that, on the answering machine? Kathy? Uh...look, boss, the crop's coming on fine, the little tips are breaking through the soil of the solarium even as we speak. No one has ever managed to grow coca plants in Hackensack before ... now spinning down into the void ... no, not Tuesday, Bruno's doing me a new version of the script, in the first draft the guy dies of a stroke or something, it takes ages, I ask you, who is going to pay good money to watch some old fuck take an hour to die ... now looking out the win- dow so intently that you seem to shoot forward through the glass into the warm air high above the noise of traffic and out over the river ... no, Proust he ain't. No, no Ode to Spring, no Rose is a Rose, no nothing. Say hullo to Harry for me. Hey, sweetheart, could you lay those Polaroids out under the sun lamp for five minutes?

*The scotch melts its ice.
Sunset on snow: eiderdowns
afame in the street.*

The Seasons—Winter

You look for that new Country & Western station at the Uptown end of the dial, hunting through the ads for hair cream and Japanese motor scooters. One. Homer describes the Shield of Achilles in Book Eighteen of the *Iliad*. Two. Alexander Pope translates Homer into English. Many years later, an ambitious souvenir wholesaler orders five gross of tiny bronze shields modelled on the frontispiece in the first edition of Pope's translation of Homer, an engraving of the Shield of Achilles, then we hear a short radio feature about a crowd filing through a museum in Madrid, the air conditioner on the blink, everyone perspiring horribly. While the tour guide describes the piece in front of them—a bronze recon- struction of a shield from the period of the Roman Republic made to the design given in Pope's translation of Homer—in a mixture of Spanish and English, the tourists notice that they are reflected in the polished nickel plating, drops of sweat and all. An old Scottish woman sees herself as a young bride, a retired used-car dealer from Normal, Illinois sees himself as his own son, and so forth. They begin to cry, one by one. The guide looks at them and shakes his head. This always happens. You switch off the mantel radio and glance out the window at the drift of brown smog that hangs over Sydney Harbour and casts a dirty veil over the Opera House, where you have an appointment at eight.

*Dark falls early. Grim
brokers hurry home to the
close of the tax year.*

Backyard

The God of Smoke listens idly in the heat
to the barbecue sausages
speaking the language of rain deceitfully
as their fat dances.

Azure, hazed, the huge drifting sky shelters
its threatening weather.
A screen door slams, and the kids come tumbling
out of their arguments,

and the barrage of shouting begins, concerning
young Sandra and Scott
and the broken badminton racquet and net
and the burning meat.

Is that a fifties home movie, or the real
thing? Heavens, how
a child and a beach ball in natural colour
can break your heart.

And the brown dog worries the khaki grass
to stop it from growing
in place of his worship, the burying bone.
The bone that stinks.

Turn now to the God of this tattered arena
watching over the rites of passage –
marriage, separation; adolescence
and troubled maturity:

having served under that bright sky you may look up
but don't ask too much:
some cold beer, a few old friends in the afternoon,
a Southerly Buster at dusk.

© 2004, John Tranter

The Revolutionaries

Look in the mirror: everybody's gone,
the black limousine dwindles down the drive
and vanishes, leaving a twinkle in the bushes,
or was that a gun? Do you think we were
invented for a future that failed to happen?
The make-up fits us like a second skin.
Open the tequila, let's drink up and get dizzy!
We've just arrived and unpacked, and you're
smoking reefers, you were always too eager ...
now you're measuring the drowning pool!
Let's use that ice-pick for a paperweight,
and bring him coffee on a tray... a white
stucco wall, cactus, a venetian blind,
a zebra coat of sunlight on the bed, and you
dolled up in orange lipstick and a new print dress!
But why are we here again? And why is the camera
staring at us with malignant eye? The hot lights
go suddenly blind and the blood-stains disappear—
we're back in the 1940s and the surly Mexicans
are crowding at the door, it's all over!
Why am I laughing? I'm watching my obituary
develop like a stain across an army map—
now they're cheering, now they stop, shocked,
as somewhere in the crowd a news photographer
loads his magazine; and then the numbers
flutter from the calendar... one last
dip in the pool, darling, and a quick drink—
tonight's the Premiere, and when our future
flickers into life we'll take a deep breath
and walk out into the sunlight, free at last.

Roland Barthes at the Poets Ball

You are painfully conscious of your discourse
reified into sudden vomit and the applause
fading down the coast past Wollongong
where D.H. Lawrence danced the mambo
with a naked miner's wife — these ambiguities
cross that fine inscribed line
between the band-leader's tuxedo smile
and the waves of sentimental music — 'behind us
towers a vast edifice' — now he's feeling fine
and the Chocolate Wheel routine begins:
one ticket, then another, and the room
collapses into damage like a Mother's Club
howling their metaphysics in the yard.
He's fumbling for his notes, the amyl nitrite
flashing behind his eyes from right to left
then the movie ploughs off the tracks and you
crawl out of the wreckage with a multiple
fracture — your metaphors flailing at the glare —
and the audience diminishes, one by one,
drinking more as they disappear into history,
the gay bars on the edge of the city raving
goodbye. You know you're losing more than
an expense of rhetoric, your life is magnified
behind a dropping bottle as your vision tilts:
ashtray, glasses, a wet packet of cigarettes
slide off the table in slow motion and
politics are acutely personal to you now
as your brutal hangover graduates in the arms
of an older woman mumbling in her sleep:
'I'm the Guest of Honour, and I'm going home.'

Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy

*The kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of
my own voice, did not exist in English at all;
it was only to be found in French.*

T.S.Eliot

*The whole of my admiration goes to the Great Mage,
inconsolable and obstinate seeker after a mystery which
he does not know exists and which he will pursue, for ever
on that account, with the affliction of his lucid despair,
for it would have been the truth...*

Mallarmé

1

Sitting by the river under damp trees
I listen to the wind in the leaves
whispering hatred and loneliness: a spirit
eats into the bones of small animals, I hear
a distant roar like a crowd driven mad,
devouring itself. When it rains in the bush
you get depressed, everything's grey
and the way you live disappears leaving
a blank mind with a slight headache
clouding the edges of the view, and the view's
fucked by your understanding of history, e.g.
this is the century of indecipherable writing,
the age of impossible verse, of wrecked metal,
cancer, bad sex and epidemic syphilis,
cities flaring into cinders, machinery
sunk and rusted in the flowing stream.
So you begin a letter to a certified
criminal — *dear Arthur, this is just a gesture*
like a self-addressed sympathy card.
You should have been at the Poets Ball,
everyone was pissed, it was like
the Left Bank... The library is full of
academics, and they're reading *your book!*
How do you like that? When you shout
the sound plunges into the tangled bracken
and the bank of tussocks, your voice
is taken away from you and buried in the hills.

2

Reading books expands the cranial capacity
and with that extra brain you can talk
to the dead, and sometimes in another language
that takes years to decipher, for example
The old poets are drifting

back into the mist: Li Po drowned, Tu Fu
 grey and dazed in the bamboo thicket—
 they used to hold hands, share a blanket
 in the winter, and get drunk together.
 That was the T'ang Gang, in the old days,
 if you survived the purges you were okay,
 but you needed nerves of steel and a healthy
 appetite; then battle, famine and ruin...
 in the eighth moon of Autumn a storm
 tore three layers of thatch from Tu Fu's hovel—
 'After the disasters of war,' he said,
 'I have had little sleep or rest,'
 and the rain pouring through the roof.
 'Now I dream of an immense mansion,' he tells me,
 'thousands of rooms, where all the cold creatures
 can take shelter, their faces alight...' *You*
should have had such pity on the future,
or were you dreaming of the future, of the
creatures huddling under the river bank,
the rain curtain smoking low on the water?
You are a parable for what has gone wrong,
 and through that mirror I see the Chinese poets
 bewildered by the twentieth century like children
 shocked into recognition of the distant voices,
 the rain in the rain-wet boughs, the bright wind.

3

The City, the Book, these ordered lies,
 it's part of a grand authoritarian design
 to drive us mad, and only the Celebrations
 keep us sane: the Fiesta, the Mardi Gras,
 Fat Tuesday, Black Friday and the Suicide Follies,
 these are our defence against the history headache,
 the dialects that glitter in the bookish gloom:
 mad butchers gilded out of recognition,
 a simpering prince made into a man,
 a man made into an idiot, and a woman burnt—
 the Romans brew up a subtle broth of poison
 and sign their decrees in purple ink,
 athletic Greeks compose an army of homosexuals,
 Egyptians unsettle the future with a
 nightmare weighing a million tonnes
 and the Gauls rave and blabber in the forest,
 shocked by their destiny: to hack a city
 out of a marauding wilderness and see
 the suburbs crawling with merchants. Like
 Rimbaud, in Aden, buying coffee—
 Ten per cent! Ten per cent! Yet that
 City's final logic is conceived by wiser men
 than those who conquered with the stink of blood
 in their nostrils, who spoke a military dialect

that said sophistication was a way of dying cheap
and cursed its own future in a foreign tongue.

4

A mad king plotting horror
in an overgrown field, broken steel
rusting on a hill, a plane tumbling
in the air then bursting into flame,
boys torn in half screaming,
the deliberations of important men
and their reluctant signatures
on a document that soon flickers into ash,
and a war, then another war—these nightmares
are neatly folded in the library,
stacked on the miles of shelves
waiting under the fluorescent glow.
And after that, the poetry selection.
*Stop telling me to suffer! Let me do it
my way!* The book trolley
trundles up and down ... Adamson said
he went to Fisher Stacks and saw
two million books — horrible vision!
And that was only Mod. Eng. Lit.!
*Sure, I want to be a great poet;
what do I do? Write lyrics for The Mob?
Kill somebody? Arthur, you
would have made a great punk rocker,*
says the consolation telegram in French:
‘Ma vie est finie: Rimbaud’, it's obvious,
and the author catalogue agrees, i.e.
No Translations Held in Stock, see Starkie, Enid,
but we didn't go to Oxford, and we ‘have no French’.

5

After the lost generation we find the single
beatnik emerging, it's like Castaways in Space
with a drug supply at the corner store
and we're getting fresh on adrenalin milk-shakes
when the beatnik declines as a focus for the novel
and the word ‘hippie’ surfaces in the dictionary.
Inside a novel is a growing boy
buried in the print and waiting to get out,
in a diary a man pretending to look
carefully at his youth, on the painting
of the whole sky the fingerprints
of an unwilling and crooked politics.
I look back into myself ‘as a visitor
looks at his room and the bowls of flowers
obviously not gathered from the garden
he can see carelessly framed in a window;
the cupboards are lined with yellowed paper

and in a trunk he finds a suit
that fashion forgot, and a broken toy
belonging to a past he never knew.'
I sure could see a lot of gum trees
from our front veranda— 'veranda', that's
not even English, it's Hindi— but not
a single human being, and if I could
they'd be farmers thinking money.
You build your future out of sweat,
pain, deeply-felt experience and alcohol.
I'm thinking of 'falling in love'.

6

Yes, I'd like to believe in a sudden
religious conversion, in the discovery
of inexhaustible energy reserves, a grasp
of sex and politics — all I can remember
is a teacher who taught us some of what he knew,
planting rebellion in a book that snapped
shut, a desperate essay into drunkenness
and a dead poet burning like a virus,
tainting the pages of a thousand magazines —
here is a thin talent shrieking imitation, there
an old man, uneasy with a maudlin respect.
Too near, too far away, not American enough,
confused with an angry complexity,
as simple as a rhyme — here is the art
of counterfeiting in a single phrase,
here is an adolescent growing up crooked;
in the universities, a small profit in a great
decline. In the double journal — art and life —
that symphony begins where
hermetic secrets grow through discord
and resolution to hermitic silence.
Art in the bookshop, life in the bar
with the dancing girls, or vice versa,
when the audience piles up everything goes
quiet, waiting for poetry to happen.

7

Three times in one year I searched
Batavia (Jakarta) listening for the ghost
along the dull canal. Machine-guns
clattered in the avenues as he had planned.
Baudelaire, dwelling in his 'too-artistic milieu'
could pander to the story of a voyage,
and lack the grit for further wandering;
Mallarmé could edit fashionable magazines
and imagine a Platonic Minotaur
behind the empty mirror, the moral being
that the Book, like great music,

falls short of our desire. *You*
talk about a theft of fire, you that are
consumed, and driven into dark. I drift through
tropic endeavours where deceit and betrayal
of temporal power is to be excused in favour
of a greater politics. Reading books.
I look for something generous,
beautiful, and profound. Rebel, Revolt,
Revolution — in these contradictions
there is a germ of peace, but at the cost
of war, and in that broil of horror
the possible gestures of love are shrivelled up.

8

Crossing the border of exile
you break off from the common spirit
in the certainty of torture. Where
is the reason in that? It is a lesson
where suffering may be seen to extend
into the rule of law, and blight others,
or tear out the roots of a milder rhetoric.
He shared with Baudelaire the circular belief
that there is no salvation without sin
and that no deed has strength without adversity;
so no vision weilds a cutting edge
without the stone. Proof? History, where
the flowers of M. de Banville wither
on the slopes of a laughable Parnassus,
or where the poison reaches out
to find its level and the theme a full
throat of harmonics in another field of poetry,
or proof in failure and destruction,
where the new metal
finds a dozen alloys in the flame.

9

The same sun blasts the burnt
volcanic cone of Aden, in a time when
British helicopters decorate the sky.
The tourist boat pulls up, and there you are!
A strong line can bring down a horizon
in flame, though no fabulous creature
stirs the ash in the cooling crucible.
Where your footprints lead me through
arenas of history, guns prop up the state.
I have business with a more subtle
oppression, not with this mechanical brand
of torture. I track the scholar through
the hagiographies and find him seeking
money, mathematics, engineering with
commendable excess and a lash of private agony

to keep the bookworms at a distance — the short
length of history, envy, imitation paddling
the shallows of a 'great talent' — and fugitive
from those ghost images which shoaled the sky
at Harar, and which begged remembrance from
one well loved who moved
too far away, and always under the shadow
of a morbid and inexplicable shame.

10

'A meteor that blazed across the sky
of poetry.' A falling star, fallen angel,
child in love with drunkenness.
A shadow. A scholar, a teacher,
a mask for violent metaphysics.
A slave beats his master. Like an
allegory badly out of true,
an old song continues under the lamplight.
Somewhere far away a weary man finds
nothing under that sun which brands him.
He learns a pointless trade, and finds
a worthless bargain in the desert.
Back to the café, and the drinks.
After the coffee, you realise
it's not suicide, it's just
'giving up'. That's not a meteor —
that's an engineer! It's terribly simple.

11

Departure into new affection:
Find yourself another boy-friend!
A towering cultural edifice: twenty poets
in a heap. And they were all —
just a minute ago — polishing their
metrical instruments, based on a device
that folds up into your waistcoat pocket
and, when extended, measures alexandrines
quickly, to an accuracy of a single syllable!
The child father to the man finds
suicide. The scout rambles far ahead
of the platoon ... cut the line, forge on,
treaties of surrender pushed through,
then the bargains go rotten
and the natives rise, foaming ... honour,
a very colonial concept. The profit motive
is modern, direct, and very attractive.
The lonely sniper broadcasts
information in a foreign tongue, and
the rabble bring a tardy homage
to the grave. *A rich young painter
posed naked, hiding his face behind*

*a photograph of your face, while
half a world away a rich woman
laughed at the joke. You have
seen these people before, eating you up,
it is like a nightmare.*

12

Some have built a theory on the ashes
lacking native resolution, and now a paste of
bullshit obscures the surface of the legend
that cast out flattery and took rhetoric
and wrung its neck. *To follow you we must
desert, or suffer Santayana's condemnation
of those who fail to profit from the
lessons of history.* I'd like to talk about
that ghost waiting in the garden
in the rain. A dozen critics are thrusting
different tickets at him, the young President
of the Media Poetry Action Group is asking
the ghost to come to the party, a ruck of editors
need his endorsement, and will forge it
if he declines. And the rain dissolves
the group photo of the Chinese Poetry Team —
Li Po back left, the one with the Rolex —
into a grey sludge; the ghost
scribbles a quick autograph, and fades away.

13

Let's invent cubism! Let's invent
dynamite! They did. Modernism
floats out onto the quiet flood.
A new century begins. Machinery
lays waste to the winter landscape,
but the poets are all in the brothels
mixing technicolor drinks and winning prizes.
Out of that testing flame ... it's as though
a fine legend were scorched in a radiation storm
and Superman awakes — not the Prince,
but the Slime Machine, the Monster
from the Black Lagoon. And then
the legions of the walking dead
move out in mutilated sleep
across the face of Europe. No book
has ever changed the destiny of stupid men.

14

It's like this: 'Having a good time
is not as easy as you think, when you're
living out a living death.'
*At your distance from the human
no one's having fun.* At the beach

young men bake their skin, the tide pulls out ...
a child wears horror and humiliation,
a jewelled manacle, for twenty years of exile
into pointless death. *Why did you do it?*
Brutal, extravagant, pretty,
face like a peasant — no, an angel,
hands like a peasant — *what a*
nasty shit you must have been. Sodomy! Lice!
I have crossed a different desert
under the same sky, the landscape
waiting like an empty glove. *Arthur!*
Give it up! Come back! Six a.m.,
should I go to Bondi for a swim?
Fresh air rushes across your face, but
literature buzzes in the back room
like a warning from a Casualty Monitor.
The Nurse jumps up and spills her coffee,
another patient dies for whom no one
writes a poem. Another
day begins, and the traffic.

15

One hundred and eight years
since he told de Banville to adopt
the telephone pole as his iron-voiced lyre —
you thought yours was the Century of Hell!
You hadn't lived! Fifty bloody wars
have stained our sleep, and poetry
has sickened in the face of economics.
I've loved and hated you
for twenty long years. I've had enough.
I've drunk enough of your beautiful deceit.
'I have lived between the covers of a book.'
I've never been a philosopher — except
briefly, at seventeen, when I broke down
and made a choice: saint, lunatic or poet,
but not a front-row forward — and picked myself up
and went on with the business of excitement.
Arthur! We needed you in '68! — you
cannot accept this burden of pity.
Learning, where the deeply human
is the object of a fierce knowledge,
can reach an imitation of the style of love,
but in that future under whose arrogant
banner we have laboured for our own rewards
we shall both be gone into that
unforgiving darkness.

Sartre at Surfers Paradise

I've been lonely for years, writing in the attic
and I owe myself a treat, so I get anxious —
really anxious — and then collapse — I mean
relax — and *you're there!* No, it's an optical
illusion, I'm cruising for a bruising down the
Rue Mort — you don't know me yet, me with my
gift wrapping hiding a heart of gold — holy
shit! — there's a beatnik party, it's the
'Speed Reader's rehearsing for their graduation —
look — they're turning into Acid Radicals ... no,
nobody's reading, and they all look healthy
despite the exceptions and the junkies and
the speech that threatens: we're us, you're
you, it's *that* kind of party, and
I get a hot flush when the cutest kid
on the team screams 'I'm Teacher's Pet!
I'm Okay!' and the students argue:
Is Rum and Coca Cola a new duet,
or a dialectic? or a way of dropping
cheaply through the floor of the visible
world? 'I wrote a letter to my friend and
on the way I dropped it ... who picked me up?'
Not the strobe, not the psychotherapist, not
the existentialists cuddling in a corner,
not the girls flashing like a double negative
that argues till the group takes off ... it's
'Karl Marx and the Moonies' and I'm anxious —
you're not there among the optical illusions
and the female impersonators — anxious
but happy, dancing in the dark.

Foucault at Forest Lodge

Your good taste is so packed with reading
you can hear a coin drop at fifty paces, but
is that how infatuation heats up to the pitch
of lust? With a trick flame and a gas tank?
General Paresis and a pack of cronies
are practising the Blitzkrieg Variation—
'A frontal attack on the Lotus Eaters
and you're home and hosed.' Our guide
to the good life is a drunken junkie, half
girl, half executioner, breathing gas, who
fucks like a disco wizard and exemplifies
sheer speed as a final virtue, eating out
with a rush: that's how tonight develops
into a drug catalogue blazing in the
waiting room where I get a crush on
Suzanne Pleshette and in that flash
rise like a broken bottle into the light.
The mob of men, dazed in the Ladies Lounge,
inhale a bright idea: *We're* not slack, we're
paralytic! For twenty cents and a wet kiss
you can take a gun and kill an alien invader,
for a dollar you can overhear a fat man
mortified, but this is only the rehearsal: by
midnight the loonies have arrived, hand in hand,
it's the real thing raving with a purple head
and a lesbian affection for noise. The jukebox
plays 'My Foolish Heart' over and over, then
breaks, and I get emotional again—we're
smoking in the hotel carnage while our future,
thinking deeply, waits for the music to begin.

Rimbaud in Sydney

Romanticism has never been properly judged —
it is as simple as a phrase of music.
We grappled and triumphed over the subway map.
What the fuck is going on around here?

It is as simple as a phrase of music,
when you are seventeen. You aren't really serious:
What the fuck is going on around here?
I'm a fiery passionate woman — I'm not a raving loony.

When you are seventeen you aren't really serious.
Reality being too thorny for my great personality,
I'm a fiery passionate woman. I'm not a raving loony;
I chose to remain silent, reality

being too thorny for my great personality.
She paid for the operation with her own money:
I chose to remain silent.
Driven into harmonic ecstasy

she paid for the operation with her own money
with a butter knife in one hand and a Coke
in the other. Driven into harmonic ecstasy,
here I am: 'I've got enough money!'

With a butter knife in one hand and a Coke in the other
let us hear the confession of a companion in Hell.
'Here I am. I've got enough money.
It has been found again.' What? 'Eternity.'

Let us hear the confession of a companion in Hell:
'We grappled and triumphed over the subway map
until it was found again.' What? Eternity:
Romanticism has never been properly judged.

Poem Ending with a Line by Rimbaud

He: It is easier to like the soldier
when he laughs and shoots a foaming dog
rather than a man, or child, and easier then
to hold the hand grenade. No plane comes
down faster when the jets are shot
than the law of gravity allows. Let the radar
plot, let the men drink poisoned lemonade.
It is better to allow the tide
to bring the fish in as they will,
or in that shoal as that shoal moves
like a flock of leaves across the hill,
across the traffic and the school of windscreens
damp with love. Leave the office,
leash the dog that nibbles at his bone,
bring all your country longings to an end.
Prepare your face to be an imprint of the scene —
the clock, the limping man, the cash machine.
Wax the ski. Compress the snow.

She: *Et mon bureau?*

The blast area

What Camus Said

Peta, flayed red on the harrowed sand.
Dune buggy aerials across the tattered sky.
'I dropped surfing,' she said, 'you know,
too slow, all that bullshit mysticism.
Give me a good stretch of tar,
something to break the monotony.
What was it Camus said? He bought his
in an auto wreck. He should know.
Want a steak?' Nothing more personal
than the firm muscle, sheen of sweat;
she tricked you with a sly honesty,
'I suppose you'd say it's sexual,
I mean, that gearstick stuff.'

I watched her drop back into second
just before the crest. She
shot off the top of the sand ridge
and vanished: Camus, Frank O'Hara,
all the restless ghosts.

1 [There's no end to this thing, it moves out,]

There's no end to this thing, it moves out,
killing. Difficult to find, yet it lives on
in plain daylight free of detectives
avoiding the plastic explosives. Like the
Gatling gun it clacks around in a windmill comedy
of noise and portability (you never know
when you might need to love it again,
and thus you'll have to carry it about, won't you)

or, later, in the French café of its choice, quite
independent of you (and yet you thought of it,
didn't you, or gave it life, or
something similar free of plastic
mint alcohol, in its own amusement
to its own delight

2 [Then it moves on, and you are heartstruck]

Then it moves on, and you are heartstruck
or stagebroken, but later you will ride out
dressed in black, on a moon-blue palomino
of your own choosing to match the scenery
and find it hiding somewhere again! and you
will laugh, possibly, and grip its hand
and take it to the beach of its richest liking
and if you will find driftwood and light the fire

put on some coffee and the aromatics of its choice,
perhaps it may promise never to leave you again!
And you will laugh at this foolish 'promise'!
knowing (having made the creature) how it misbehaves
understandably, having to avoid the trap of aromatics,
burnt coffee, and a million tons of love.

3 ['Free at last!' you will smile, self-deluded,]

'Free at last!' you will smile, self-deluded,
knowing your tears ready to gush at the slightest
memory of its beauty, and all the dumb remembrances
dogging your darkness when you sleep alone
and dream of catching it again and how you will hold
hands et cetera in a foam bath of love!
You sleep alone with staring eyes and
a handful of mint leaves tousled in your hair

(your freshly washed hair, beautiful!) and you are still
hoping to stun it again, and have it all,
all for yourself like a schoolgirl ... you,
fool, stagestruck clubfinger, still in love
with its aroma, with its sweet dreams aroma
bullshit nerve gas platitudes!

4 [Sunstruck on Wiltshire Boulevard nothing makes sense,]

Sunstruck on Wiltshire Boulevard nothing makes sense,
autos starved of gas and people drivelling,
and yet ... yet you remember Coleridge, and several
Revolutions! How do you explain it? With the
tears running down like that? Your makeup
blown and your cover shredded up? You know
your right hand is empty, no gun, sun bathers
bathing on the run, and you getting out!

Ah, you should be used to it. You make the thing you
love, and give it ornaments, and tricking out the deck
becomes the rage, and baubles make the being
of the thing! You start again, new private eye
greasing on the move, and all you look for
is bruised light clouded in the mirror's sheen.

5 [Big deal you're all alone again with freaky dreams]

Big deal you're all alone again with freaky dreams
bumbling through the forest where you find yourself,
the dream fumbling with a club, but don't think
the big freaky Dream becomes the Poem.
The club smashes down the pretty drinks
you and it loved so well.
So you and it and all the sticky failures
move out to that new territory

full of treachery and broken glass,
queer declensions, fields of icicles,
frost, snow, blue gloom and paradise
where you, it, she, he and them balloon
into the verbal network like a rubber sponge
(you and your tangled hair: beautiful!

6 [the Poem finds a mutual revulsion]

the Poem finds a mutual revulsion
to discuss, and if talk founders on the trunk line
on the rocks of new leucotomy, as some believe,
by the Vilna, by the Don, after black nerve winter
which you know will never end so long as
you and it are arguing with club and claw
you hear the neural network breaking down
transmitters fusing with the voltage overload —

you know it really loves you something dreadful
endogenous depression's not enough
the Doctor breaks in with a message from the Poem
now long vanished: 'Meet me, princess, lover!
all smacked up on the highway
down by the river bridge' the new trap trick

7 [The city is beautiful in the evening,]

The city is beautiful in the evening,
seen from a height, with that traffic
breaking rules along the line of light.
Motorised developments emerge from the Poem that
is the city into the Poem that breaks away from
your dotted white mind, so you are caught in your
emotions like a flock of red lights and the buses
bustling to get through along the pipeline.

You are told to say 'The city *is*
beautiful in the evening,' as though nightfall
grew into a frock of lights to clothe the Poem
that now walks in beauty like the diesel tram.
You, collapsing back to trucks shunting in the yard
of your wide emotion now reduced to metal poverty.

8 [You are inside the 'scream'. Yes, it's very like]

You are inside the 'scream'. Yes, it's very like
an empty room with sky blue holes where the
paintings have been removed for your protection.
No clothing, it's called 'naked' like the 'scream'
in the empty room becoming the house expanding into
a sky blue hole blowing up to the exact size
of your imagination. Think of television with its
cathode snow above the treeline going blue.

You will search for emaciated verbs to stuff up
the cracks of your imagination for imagination read
horror of the empty room where love is all you beg for
and the Poem has gone to Acapulco for the Fire Season
of the Acapulco Gold and other aphrodisiacs
of its liking, of its best desire,

9 [Yet this loneliness only means that the Poem]

Yet this loneliness only means that the Poem
has gone off to ponder its resources, so let it alone
in the café where it can meander through the lists
of great men and their works. For isn't it you
who feature so brightly in its wildest dreams?
You don't believe it? Yet it's true, for it finds
nothing else to render comfort in that realm
where words tumble into space and get lost

in a cold bigger than a plastic bomb exploding
a silent violet blast in outer space or so
you imagine, yet something remains of 'kindness'
for your fortitude in giving nerve kicks to this poem
who rushes out with other 'friendly writers'
and gets totally lost on the fringe of the blast.

10 [Exploring the blast area is like]

Exploring the blast area is like
thousands of tiny microbes having arguments,
so you prepare for the inevitable monster.
To return to the movies is like eating cake, so
easy and so forlorn that tears spring to mind.
Is it cold beneath the Arafura Sea? Will television
pop like smoke bombs across the paddy fields? And then
in our armchair the girls will cuddle us together, so

warm, so drastic, that only our manacles will be able
to prevent us from harm and moral slop.
This is what the Poem will hit us with: is it
good enough to be prepared? Or will lunatics
adopt the mask of eminent professors
and slide us all down into the cloud chamber?

11 [So the Poem flutters in the room without a cage,]

So the Poem flutters in the room without a cage,
no message, reach for window, brush the mirror
with its feathered wing. Too much? How much
will the average line pretend, how much tension
will the wire bear before the wire begins to sing,
the tightrope breaks a knot? How much meaning
will your page extend? When the line repeat
defeat! defeat! And whose the feet that

beat against the stair? Climbing to an attic
with a view of ruin and a handy ledge.
When did the wind 'wither through the sedge'
like a madman running fingers through his hair?
Force your hesitance. Make do. Face the
sheet of glass. Despair.

12 [Beneath the point of view there's]

Beneath the point of view there's
something like a hole, and if you wait around
it will crawl all over your body. The hole
is called 'prose' and never ends, as the point of view
is named 'verse' and never ceases riddling.
You could do better. Later the girls
will lick you all over like a wet hole.
Sooner than you think the ocean will become huge.

It is better if you leave. Beneath the film
there's a gaping laugh like a traffic accident,
and all your fortunes will come true there.
Wait for the lights to change and jump into the soup.
The Poem is nowhere to be seen, so piss off. Later,
in the bar full of maniacs, you will be given a prize.

13 [The shoddiness of the work springs from the obvious]

The shoddiness of the work springs from the obvious
haste with which it was assembled, you say, as
a roebuck might spring from a bush if prodded,
and the vast size which overwhelms the viewer
as an elephant will blot out a footstool,
and then crush it. But more must be said —
apart from the speed which is charming, dizzy,
and at the same time dubious, and the weight

lowering over your shoulder like a cloud of dirty gas,
there are similes, metaphors and gruesome images
all tending to confuse like a martini's ingredients
all slopped together, stirred up and not shaken
in the proper manner, for there is a great
lack of proper manner in the whole shitty mess.

14 [And more repulsive than this absence of decorum]

And more repulsive than this absence of decorum
which may be just a trick like a talking dog
or a brand new theory of poetics dragged
unwillingly out of a hat and made to squeak,
there is a sour taste and a whetted edge
to the thirsty intellect, as though the Poem
loathed its very medium and thus the world and the
big blue sky which we know is good for breathing.

How can we endorse a monster? Christianity is dead
but something else lives on, and it is our duty
to believe it. How can we adore a dirty head?
We do not masturbate. We respect the 'truth' of 'art'
which is now having its pretty face rubbed in the
shit of politics like a new theory of a talking pig.

15 [The concept of the abandoned Poem reluctantly]

The concept of the abandoned Poem reluctantly
becomes plausible, and then very interesting.
Like all bad art it is phoney. Goodbye!
At night you could hear the language
burning fiercely, and the heavy traffic
moving about. Goodbye! Oh, how I loved you!
Isn't that what it said? And all this
burnt to a crisp! And where is that Poem

we loved so heedlessly and hoped for so much from?
(Doesn't that whip your tragic sentiment to foam?)
I drank a Pepsi like they do in N.Y.
and that fizzy noise was like how
you could hear the Sonnet feasting on itself.
Goodbye hopeless poems! Kiss me! Kiss me! Goodbye!

Crying in early infancy

1 [Now the party is over the beach dissolves]

Now the party is over the beach dissolves
in a morbid and equivocal Brazilian atmosphere
I have especially constructed in the hope
that the book will write itself, but Bill screams
at my efforts. Write another party, he flashes ...
total aviator glasses automatic magazine!
Once I put down an astronaut he moves downrange.
Once I loaded the magazine, I ran out of paper.

Once I was happy, at the middle of the party.
The tidal wave hangs about behind the harbour wall.
It has travelled a long way from Okinawa.
Guns thump beyond the jungle's periphery
in a rigmarole of purpose. There is no
weather where the beach repeats itself.

2 [If you think of Bali, that strange]

If you think of Bali, that strange
colour stains the horizon. Recognise it,
it belongs to you, even though
it will always be too far away
to be of any use. Think of calculus
and how it has benefited mankind.
You are pleased as well as benefited,
though you're too thick-headed to recognise it.

Be pleased, quickly, and go to Denpasar.
Denpasar is at the heart of Bali
as tiny increments are at the heart of calculus,
though Riemann, Boole and Lobachevsky
long ago ridiculed the role of algebra
in the creation of profitable works of art.

3 [It is heavy with the breath of bad images]

It is heavy with the breath of bad images
it is more than you deserve it is easy
like a news lesson in Portuguese it has
a taste for racing alcohol and other
delicacies how lucky you are how lucky
or maybe it reads how disreputable and diseased
it is easy to read like a polka dot it is
madly in love like a silly kid good night

it cries and wastes away utterly
so trendy so paranoid and so infected
you are already sketching its obituary!

so remorseful so immense so damn evasive
while deep in the Mango Trench a team of anarchists
and so on how I love you how political

4 [She turns off the radio and listens to the news]

She turns off the radio and listens to the news,
she talks about the 'cultivated appetite' and how
culture is a necessary adjunct to a life
blighted by a greedy proletariat. I guess
her thirst for beauty is a limp disease.
I suppose religion breeds an art that aims
at frigid excellence or graven images,
depending on the climate of opinion that

we can now see from our beautiful balloon.
'Cheat, magician, thief, have explanation
for deceit!' The lady lights her pipe, forgetting
hydrogen, and the soft climate of
South America envelops us in woolly cloud.
Tiny poems flutter from her lips.

5 [They burn the radio and listen to the blues. They]

They burn the radio and listen to the blues. They
saunter through the cultivated gardens like giraffes
and whisper to each other, they are clever,
they build and revel in a culture shock,
they have an easy beauty and a multiple
limp. I suppose they stock religion in a
Frigidaire, and their prayers for the well-being
of the inhabitants of South America are touching.

We should leave them soon, for their dangerous magic
is a cheat, and none can explain its delicate
attraction: they reach a height of ecstasy by breathing
hydrogen and soft playmates endure them. Their minds
are woolly, loud; their speech is full of gaffes. Yet
they are almost lovely because of their beliefs.

6 [You love her: she is lovely in her briefs, though]

You love her: she is lovely in her briefs, though
when she plays the blues she does it drivelling
of 'life'. She is touchable in grief, to see her
attempting to turn on the radio is pitiful
and will move you to an elevated sympathy.
She cultivates a walk like an elegant giraffe.
That's about all she cares for, yet her appetite
is not confined. To sex she is polite,

and her strategies are a model of love, for
she imitates the ambush of a thousand softnesses
and will lick your hand like a little puppy.

Beware her cheating, for she gravitates toward
an art that aims at gravid images of profit,
and will bring you down like a limp balloon.

7 [The kissy blue chloroform is brief,]

The kissy blue chloroform is brief,
an antidote for every failing gesture,
thankfully, and swiftly brings you down.
Then you turn up the radio's subterfuge
and hear the bright flicker as the lady's
wishes grow into something huge and indefinable.
Your most desirable woman leaves for North America,
you find her photo in the San Francisco News

lighting a pipe, and guess what's in it,
and it isn't grass. The British Foreign Office
has a file on her attractions in a lilac cover,
and they are always fighting over the exact shade
of meaning. As a playmate she is quite delirious,
high as a kite and nimbus as a cloud. Kiss!

8 [Move away, leave the cheating magicians]

Move away, leave the cheating magicians
to imitate culture poorly and to be polite
like Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure
of the Sierra Madre*, for when they are grave
the blues turn to muzak and the whole party
throws up all over your white sports coat.
Soon enough you find their photographs
listed in a folder code-named 'Caroline'

and no matter how they use their useful influence
there's no explanation. (She will give you
the exact shade of meaning of a sticky
kiss enveloped in a nubile judgment.)
Thank the chloroform: it brought you up, after all,
and all of Europe is now your playground.

9 [He abandoned the delusions that culture]

He abandoned the delusions that culture
strikes you with, avoiding sex polemics, though
the slick and socially mobile ladies are
nubile with subterfuge. They, sweet ones,
have a new altitude, and lick their lips.
When the branch broke he bit the dust.
They have a talent for the game at hand,
yet a deeper lack of age and caution

seems to beg a remedy like 'failure'.
He dropped into the fashionable bar
in mid-flight with a fierce whisper: 'God,

the wife and kids!' and the flock of ladies
are the more beautifully arrayed for his having
said it like judgment, condemnation, punishment.

31 [Being brave is not enough, this easy]

Being brave is not enough, this easy
generosity in the loosening grip, in the
strange light which is given off by bottles
when they are tossed from a bobbing boat
and sink, yet do not sink in that
marsh water we have tasted uneasily
and which illuminates our adolescence so that
hot machines are broken and a promise

is a memory as touching as a bad
but well-intentioned movie, though these
artefacts of childhood drifting into age
will never leave us altogether, for our love
even of ourselves feeds on them and on the
endless sorrow of their pressing toward death.

52 [The war is over at last]

The war is over at last
and I have been charged with writing.
I have been ordered to write an elegy,
the dream commands, by bruised boys unable
to command a comprehension of murder.
I am charged with a duty, the committee decides,
to glorify the implements of war! No guilt!
But I make a list of all that is left.

The old world is gone, the Coca Cola
and the benzedrine, the rifles eulogised
and stacked at attention. An old caretaker
is oiling the barrels with a rag and smiling.
The ranks of blued steel grin in the dark.
As much as I am able, I promise the rifles are rusting.

53 [Unwilling footsteps crunch across the drive]

Unwilling footsteps crunch across the drive.
Someone watches through a misted glass,
hears the clock tick, the minutes pass.
Someone knows that someone is alive,
but needs to be reassured. Pour the drink
and place the record on the gramophone.
You're alive, and warm. She is alone.
Buy her presents, wrap her up in mink

like a Christmas parcel, make a gift
of everything you own. The stealthy attack
where light falls victim to shadow, a cry

starts up from the cellar, in a look the rift
of fear appears — these must be pushed back.
This is your duty. Perform it till you die.

54 [I know a man who lives in the dark]

I know a man who lives in the dark.
He writes in black ink on black paper.
Whatever he writes is wonderful.
He thinks about history. At midnight
in the light from an ultra-violet lamp
he begins to write. The book will be read
by school-children, he decides, and politicians,
and he considers the struggling republics

and the joys of a country childhood. He paints
a picture of raw youth forged into a legend,
a terrible landscape informed with a sombre glory;
but the ground is a turmoil of combat whose name
is murder. Musing on the republic's favour
he writes a manual on the implements of death.

55 [Waiting and waiting, there's an end to it.]

Waiting and waiting, there's an end to it.
Eating bad food, sleeping on the floor,
there's an end to that too. One day
your enemies reach out of your head quickly
and take you to the cold and dirty places,
and you're too old for that sort of thing.
The bad music keeps you there, and makes you cruel,
and you are the loved one you are least kind to.

Waiting and waiting for the good weather,
there's a hard art in that, and a sour man —
too old for that sort of punishment — does it badly.
But one day you wake up and go back home and if you're
tough and lucky you leave most of it behind. Eating
good food, accepting kindness — there's an art in that.

69 [Delineate the landscape where you]

Delineate the landscape where you
grew up. That's an acceptable start.
But in the droll town where I was born
no one ever used the word 'landscape',
nor the concept, nor the word 'nor', ever.
I'm being honest, that's
a good start, eh? Grow up,
who gives a fuck about a 'good start',

I went to college like a privilege
and learnt to wield a metaphor in each hand
and got a kiss on the arse for being good.

Who made a million? The Student Prince?
Who made a profit from a lasting work of art?
Who was improved by the perfect landscape?

The Age of Mechanical Reproduction

If we laugh and photograph ourselves
which is difficult but not impossible
we create a system for analysing humour
and days later we are stuck with it
like Marxism too quickly understood
and thus betrayed. Is a smile a role?
The snapshots make a guess, and unavoidably
a complex answer is building up inside us

conditioned by empiricism. We love and burn
just for a year or so, then take those photos
and lose a precious ability and a sweetheart
and nothing seems the same, ever again.
This dogging loss chews at my heel and soon
years later, we are less than what we knew.

Lufthansa

Flying up a valley in the Alps where the rock
rushes past like a broken diorama
I'm struck by an acute feeling of precision –
the way the wing-tips flex, just a little
as the German crew adjust the tilt of the sky and
bank us all into a minor course correction
while the turbo-props gulp at the mist
with their old-fashioned thirsty thunder – or
you notice how the hostess, perfecting a smile
as she offers you a dozen drinks, enacts what is
almost a craft: Technical Drawing, for example,
a subject where desire and function, in the hands
of a Dürer, can force a thousand fine ink lines
to bite into the doubts of an epoch, spelling
Humanism. Those ice reefs repeat the motto
whispered by the snow-drifts on the north side
of the woods and model villages: the sun
has a favourite leaning, and the Nordic gloom
is a glow alcohol can fan into a flame.
And what is this truth that holds the grey
shaking metal whole while we believe in it?
The radar keeps its sweeping intermittent promises
speaking metaphysics on the phosphor screen;
our faith is sad and practical, and leads back
to our bodies, to the smile behind the drink
trolley and her white knuckles as the plane drops
a hundred feet. The sun slanting through a porthole
blitzes the ice-blocks in my glass of lemonade
and splinters light across the cabin ceiling.
No, two drinks – one for me, one for Katharina
sleeping somewhere – suddenly the Captain
lifts us up and over the final wall
explaining roads, a town, a distant lake
as a dictionary of shelter – sleeping
elsewhere, under a night sky growing bright with stars.

747 Sonnet

(Written on the way to LA in a 747, March 24, 2013)

A, tint of ash, pastel grey
And pale amber flakes, E, a feast
Of emerald ice-blocks at the break of day
When blood and gold tincture the mystic East.
I, less an order, more a hint
Of Eau de Nil, flavours the local square
Where cobblestones hacked from the local flint
Bear a skin of ice that dazzles the air.
O for a beaker full of the warm South
Where tourists faint in the sticky Roman heat
And U offer purple promises of love
To be exchanged the next time we meet.
Qantas perfects its algorithm for seat yield;
a truck dumps rakes and shovels onto a field.

The Distillation of a Style

They were running well ahead of time
when a jagged flash cracked the perspex
and the road skidded out of sight.

A fighter plane drops over the rise
and leaps forward for the sea. I am left
to think on eagerness. They were willing
to leave risk out of the reckoning so that a style
could be distilled: trim, essential, tight,
without encumbrances and no remorse,
lopping off a second from the reflex arc.

They broke through the forest and down the slope
with a burst of power. Some detail bent askew.

They tracked a red splash along a wall
and left a smudge of oilsmoke wiped across the sky
in a hasty scrawl, an empty valley,

and a fighter plane dwindling into the cloudbank
where the line of sea attempts a perfect emptiness.

Smaller Women

I resigned to tell mother a secret sign,
insolent napkin. But it's natural to commit a crime,
the second dose of germs that make you cross,
and then the moral lapses teach us
with their beaks.

Among the crimes you botched, were you not
floating up to heaven in a frock? 'Bless you,
bless the solemn symphony of duty.'
Grudging duty, that is, to quickly quell
a pallid polka

or pump up a yelping shiver to a spasm,
the kind that young gentleman only hear about
rattling their rusty skates among the rafters.
I came here young, able and long-shanked
and left limping.

Oh, tell it to the horse marines, that if we were
agreeable, why, we were also – just a little –
ashamed of our pink hissy fits. Thus taught,
'Shiftless, have done for, knock and enter.'
So, knock it off.

As the slumbrous subject of heaven glares
down on us, do the children aspire to a better
pedagogy? Bless your more sensitive arm.
And I may advertise – forgive me –
a scribbled graph

that would paper over the filthy morass
to which you now offer amorous admission,
lures of tissue-paper, to clog the pale
epochs yawning on the baroque porch,
your careless greed.

© 2003, John Tranter
From: Trio

Sorehead

I was arrested because of that internal memo,
and ended up in a cell, then I was told to sit
with the police and the local bigwigs.
In the hushed and fast darkening room they said
someone—*someone*—had reduced the safety margin
on the airport risk factor, and I got the blame.
The sky that day was a pale, clear blue, but
that was happening outside, and far away.

The cop on duty would not open the tomb
of the deported—sorry, departed—and as usual
he had a story. Every movie, he said, depends
on a script, and the narrative grows out of
market research: a set of standard deviations. Art?
What would they know? Open the tomb, and let me in.

Rain

"Il pleut doucement sur la ville." (Rimbaud)

1

The knowledge of darkness grows on her past
like crystals, and her broken eyes reflect
the slow smile in the torture of carriages
thudding over blackened snow into the waste of Poland.
"Pale stars tinkled like icicles over the roofs."

She slices the mental photographs of time
in her soft apartment. The morning
deliquescent, the tree brilliant at the window.
She dances into the wall of music.
Outside, the grass burns green with dew.

And then the street, the girl, erect
and pale with luxury
going out to meet the dispersion
of highways. She calls it
the crucifixion in the rain.
"Seeing Him thus, my eyes
stuck in my brain like daggers."
She becomes the arborescent
and pluvial day, whose light revives
the fractured bloom of memory.

2

She looked everywhere at nothing
being "bored" — and we would hardly speak
waiting for the leaves that never came,
the landscape locked in tropical collapse.

The reckless city dragged us back and forth
clutching hands against the fevered light
Night at the door like a dog
with broken back and bloodied teeth,
dawn the promised gallows leaning
on the shoulder of the hill. We waited,
imprisoned in the manacles of memory.

Sometimes we talk,
being bored, and the summer
swells above us in a storm of light.

I see her in the haze of exile
walking the city, holding
someone's hand, looking at nothing,

gentle among the devastation of avenues
under the canopy of burning day.

3

Night falls again
and we go again to engage the dream
and it is raining, “doucement”, on the town.

The morning of rain and ashes
and cold earth settles like a stone.

Storm over Sydney

Blustering over the Harbour, brilliant rain
slaps and blathers at the rusty Bridge.
I dodge for cover as the sky turns green.
Cars wobble and skid on William Street,
hot with mechanical rage.

Lightning strikes twice: a blinding white
crack! and the echo whacks the concrete.
I fossick and dawdle in the supermarket aisles
safely underground, among the paper plates
and the jars of honey.

The thunder has trundled a thousand miles
and boiled the Pacific black to bother us all,
and it's dull and sick from its long journey.
Now I'm trying to wheel a crook trolley
from the shopping mall:

the chrome's rusty, and a bent wheel clanks.
It's the season of ruby cellophane and holly;
the gutters are chock-full of summer hail
fresh-frozen and smashed into chunks.
At the café I doze

in a corner, read the messages and the mail,
and unwrap the book I've bought. It's old, old:
the writer's fervour whispering down the years,
epigrams elaborating a narrative — as though
such fragments could!

On schedule, the weather grumbles and raves
westward over the suburbs. I'm happy. I know
a little park where I can park the car,
sit on a wet bench and watch the waves
fume in the amethyst air.

Under Tuscan Skies

In the calm of a Lyons' Tea Shop near Piccadilly
punctuated with rustling noises and clinkings,
Edward found himself looking back
on his time in Tuscany. He had seen it then
as 'the life so short, the craft so long to learn',
in fact venomous to endure, those
horrible neighbours, but useful fodder
for his writing project, at the time, but now
in the British gloom it seemed fleeting and fruitless,
like the life of a white foam flake
amid a clashing of steel knives and hot looks –
why had he written it up in the form of little
poems, clotted with factitious insights? –
tissue-paper in a threshing machine – in fact,
he now prefers the incomplete circle of his drafts
to the blunt certainty of the finished book, as
the months of hope spent plotting his little holiday
were better than the awful actuality.
What had he written? Watery flashback –

The ancient Roman sun preserves the sky,
reserving his warmth to faithfulness,
shining upon the undismayed towers,
whose images enscrolled the situation.
Lucy, recently rebuffed, sat speaking her mind
to her frequent and attentive male companion,
to hew a passage to his understanding.
'He, the God of Love and Shopping
may not have been hurt by your bruising snub,
to Him it's just water off a cold shoulder,'
she murmured, nudging closer. Would
clutch come to seize? And seize
to feed a passion? Eager boys, she knew,
would be prostrate at her feet, if they could.

A conversation in the forest, the grove
that borders the municipal zoo:
Her sex makes a brief longing.
– Thank you, more of the same.
I went straight to the heart of the matter.
– My dear, gentlemen are different.
But these two ladies are as bright as possible.
– Then what are you made of?
The same stuff as parsons are, but
with a warmer blood in my body.

They were walking about like restless animals,

ursine, almost blasphemous in their excessive exercise.

In a deft aside Edward explained the meaning
of the landscape, I mean the Mediterranean.
It was satisfying to imagine those huge
geological forces striving for a million years
to provide a vista that perfectly illustrated
certain Romantic imaginings that gushed out of
the tail-pipe of the Industrial Revolution.

The scene: The arrival. The action: She knew.
Lucy rehearsed her emotions under Parnassus,
till the late hour caught in her throat.
I was young fool! That fight with the driver!
Blunder, irretrievable, and so forth.
The clumsy dolt. Social gaffe. Red face.
Lucy, wincing, understanding everything.
Ow! He will never forgive me! Fuck it!

But why should she be upset? She's just a girl,
and one day as a lady she will sweep away
the wraiths that cloud the view, just as
a Viennese mind doctor with a gesture
calms a dog. But now, at muggy midnight,
she found herself alone on the road,
engraving her love malignantly upon a stone,
as a seething of hyacinths breathed
upon the hushed evening. So be it!
In the snows of recognition there is little warmth
and less life; better to guess and hesitate.

Now a storm yells and clambers over the horizon,
battering rain herds them into a shelter,
among the shadows comes forgiveness,
a prison of green centuries gladly huddled into.
Shuddering they reach out for
one another's mortifying spasms...

I had read, Edward murmured to himself,
that the floods of love in their urgent spate
magnify a horoscope, and that the god of fate,
leaning on the sky, counts our chances
on enormous fingers – so let the storm cease:
now the world is soaked and glittering,
and the young lovers creep back to find
their place in it, among the clattering traffic
and the rattle of cups.

From: Trio

After Hölderlin

When I was a young man, a drink
often rescued me from the factory floor
or the office routine. I dreamed
in the mottled shade in many a beer garden
among a kindness of bees and breezes,
my lunch hour lengthening.

As the flowers plucked and set in the little bottle
on the table still seem to hanker for the sun,
nodding in the slightest draft, so I
longed for a library loose with rare volumes
or a movie theatre's satisfying gloom
where a little moon followed the usherette
up and down the blue carpeted stairs.

You characters caught up in your emotions
on the screen, how I wish you could know
how much I loved you; how I longed
to comfort the distraught heroine
or share a beer with the lonely hero.

I knew your anxieties, trapped
in a story that wouldn't let you live;
I felt for you when you were thrown from the car
again and again; when the pilot
thought he was lost and alone,
I was speaking the language of the stars
above his tiny plane,

murmuring in the sleepy garden, growing up
among the complicated stories.
These dreams were my teachers
and I learned the language of love
among the light and shadow
in the arms of the gods.

Hôtel de Ville

The kids should visit a history museum
in their senior year, to understand disgrace as
one form of Clinton's victory. On the other hand
the European Community foreign debt gives
everybody bad dreams. So we do need to solve
the problem of students reading difficult things
that will lead them astray: why did Rimbaud
turn from socialism to capitalism? As if

it matters. He is his own consolation prize.
We'd be delighted to have his uniform.
We want to see all the modern art stuff, too.
Thank you. Press the button marked "monument"
and see what happens: a recorded voice says
"I have wasted my life," and we pay to listen.

The Moment of Waking

She remarks how the style of a whole age
disappears into your gaze, at the moment
of waking. How sad you are
with your red shirt, your features
reminiscent of marble, your fabulous
boy-girl face like a sheet of mist
floating above a lake.

Someone hands me a ticket,
in Berlin a hunchback
is printing something hideous;
my passport is bruised with dark blue
and lilac inks. Morning again,
another room batters me awake—
you will be haunting the mirror like silver—

now the nights punish me with dreams
of a harbour in Italy—you are there
hung in the sky on broken wings
as you always have been, dancing,
preparing to wound me with your
distant and terrible eyes.

ROBERT ADAMSON

b. 1943

Born in Sydney, Adamson grew up in Neutral Bay and on the Hawkesbury River, New South Wales. He has successfully combined the careers of writer, editor and publisher. From 1970 to 1985 he edited *New Poetry magazine* and in 1988, with Juno Gemes, he established Paper Bark Press. He has published fifteen collections of poetry and three collections of 'autobiographical fiction'.

The recipient of many awards and prizes – including the National Book Council's Banjo Award, the New South Wales Literary Awards' Kenneth Slessor Prize and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for poetry – Adamson was awarded the F.A.W. Christopher Brennan prize in 1994, for lifetime achievement in literature. Most recently, Adamson published the first volume of his autobiography, entitled *Inside Out*, recounting his youth in 1950s and '60s Australia. In 2004, Adamson made his first trip outside of Australia, reading to packed audiences at the Royal Festival Hall in London. His new and selected collection entitled *Mulberry Leaves* is available internationally through Bloodaxe Books.

Any cartographer of Australian poetry would be foolish not to map Adamson's Hawkesbury alongside Slessor's Sydney and Murray's Bunyah. Adamson's voracious, often lethal, imagination has over forty years devoured many influences; his poetry as a whole partakes of an age-old conversation. Discussing his own poetic inheritance, Adamson remarks:

It flows out from Robert Duncan's essay on Whitman, then meanders through the French Symbolism of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, rushes under Crane's bridge, has a creek running through Brennan's prose and McAuley's final canticles and through Webb's tributary; then it comes up into my swamp in riddles. There are other streams of it that even shoot out into the rapids of New York.

Adamson's ironic treatment of his recurrent use of the river metaphor belies a degree of sardonic detachment from, if not unease with, the development of such charts of literary inheritance.

In the very short selection presented here, I have chosen poems that draw and redraw Adamson's imaginative homeland, the Hawkesbury River, and its inhabitants. What is remarkable in reviewing these poems, drawn from over forty years of work, is the concentration of will and imagination, the fashioning and refashioning of the natural world into the world of symbols and the equally organic generation of a poetics through deep and long meditation. Adamson does not simply draw on the Hawkesbury as some water-colourist-cum-poet (though he does offer perhaps the most exacting imaginative excavation of a particular landscape in Australian poetry) but creates from it and inhabits it as an imaginative homeland, a place of myth. Through Adamson's poetry, the Hawkesbury overlaps the river of Heraclitus, the shoals of the Hebrus where Orpheus' remains sing their eerie song and, of course, the Styx. Adamson once commented:

I am lucky to have the actual Hawkesbury, I love it, it's beautiful, it is the world flowing through my life, full of birds, fish, mangroves, mud and stars. I'm fortunate enough to be able to live here because my grandfather gave me the river. And yet

it's not the river I try to write, my poetry's landscape is darker. I am writing about the internalised landscape. There's another thing that Bonnefoy mentions, not heaven, not hell, almost an Eden, a place that you imagine, it's just across the river. If you live there though, if you imagine it into being, it dissolves – but it may be where you are living. You can never get there and yet it is where you live.

Not heaven, not hell, but the abyss Baudelaire welcomes as opening upon the unknown and the new. Adamson states that the river is an internalised landscape, which is in part an inheritance from his grandfather (as 'Creon's Dream' emphasises). This has been a conscious and laborious process, a working of hardship and devotion, that has tempered his work from its earlier new romanticism into a poetry that is wholly original. Adamson's earlier renderings of the river (such as 'The river') seek an ecstatic relation to experience, while many of his more recent works display a growing sense of poetry's possibility of opening experience simultaneously to the presence of the world and the knowledge of death that haunts that presence, to the intimacy of dying. Adamson's most recent poems draw experience, captured in the landscape of the river, into a close relation with the unknown just on the other side of that river resonant with the Styx.

Robert Adamson is one of the truly great poets of place and deep meditation. Over almost four decades of dedication to his craft and to his imaginative homeland, the Hawkesbury River, Adamson has forged a body of work equal to the various poets and poetries he has engaged along his often troubled and illuminating way. From Bob Dylan to Wallace Stevens, from Arthur Rimbaud to Gerard Manley Hopkins, from Shelley to Zukovsky, Adamson winds a path through the abyssal forest of symbols to the natural world, driving Symbolism over the edge into the darkness of a nihilism still able to experience, praise, savour and celebrate the world in all its impossibility and presence.

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The Gathering Light

Morning shines on the cowling of the Yamaha
locked onto the stern of the boat,
spears of light shoot away
from the gun-metal grey enamel.
Now I wait for God to show
instead of calling him a liar.

I've just killed a mullo way –
it's eighty five pounds, twenty years old –
the huge mauve-silver body trembles in the hull.

Time whistles around us, an invisible
flood tide that I let go
while I take in what I have done.
It wasn't a fight, I was drawn to this moment.
The physical world drains away
into a golden calm.

The sun is a hole in the sky, a porthole –
you can see turbulence out there,
the old wheeling colours and their dark forces –
but here on the surface of the river
where I cradle the great fish in my arms
and smell its pungent death, a peace
I've never known before – a luminous absence
of time, pain, sex, thought of everything
but the light.

Reaching Light

Where was it we left him?
We say the journey's up, but maybe

memory sinks deeper.
Our journey so far

has been quiet, the only
incident being that rock dislodged

as he spun around on his heel.
What was that stuff – brimstone?

The first slice of sunlight glanced off
a slab of dark marble that turned to glow.

His back moved ahead of me –
his curls, shoulders,

that neck. What new bone was he inventing
in his shuffling head, what chance

that a doorway would appear and then a house?
The dark supported me, comfortably

behind me, a cradle woven from
demon hair. As I rose

and climbed toward day, his turning head,
those eyes – strips of memory,

silver tides, moons rising over the
rim of the world—

brought back the day we were married,
standing in fine rain, then escaping from family,

sex by a rolling surf in a high wind, velvet
heavens and the stars omens:

calendars, clocks, zodiacs –
straight, bent signs.

The rebel angel

Shit off with this fake dome of a life, why
should I remain here locked in my own
buckling cells? So there's always
a way round the city mornings when parks
are lakes of smouldering green —
& there's a way as you're blown along
by some great vision of a cop
who keeps farting inside your gut —
& you know so well the way that'll carry you back:
follow a railway line

that's studded with muck-green stations
& bubblers spouting lukewarm water — No,
you've left it too late & now there's
cold weather coming along & that
pile of junk in your brain — These days it's
risky to drive after midnight.
It's slowing you down always looking behind
all the time getting someone to pluck
down the blinds — So now as you spin
through a drunk there's lots of reasons
you have to stay put — reasons that say
you can't piss off anymore from the calm
of serving two and a half years: of knowing
it's lights out at ten every night, of knowing
the sleepless lays churning in your bunk
until each counted dawn, of singing
without sound — I've looked around every inch
of the jail & dug my own groove in yellow
sandstone, & searched without sleep
& searched again

back on the street in the rain — searched for
some kind of rebel angel,
some kind of law.

The beautiful season

Some sunny day does not support any more
reason than a dull one; green lights
from the harbour still remind us of a tour
through Spain. Two whistling-kites

are fishing in a shallow day: even birds
would not support a proper reason
for the inclusion of corroborated words.
A sample of the beautiful season

came wrapped in aluminium foil: oh cute
as a new drug — but let's remember
how the most vicious thug wore silk suits
and plugged sparrows in December.

The sunny day is no more 'cute' than a drug
in foil; lights on water are seldom
memories. Our bird-loving thug
has returned muttering 'O Kingdoms'

Landscape

The grey wharf creaks under my weight
maybe a hundred years
since these piles were driven in
and the planks laid across
The river moves slowly over mudbanks
swallows dive and glide through clouds
of white ants in the low sky
I take my fishing rod in my hands
shift weight onto one leg
and cast the bait in a long and graceful arc
It splashes beside an old snag
I look across the river at a derelict house
its for-sale sign askew
on the paling fence and the garden
a bush of rusted wire in the yard the great
hulk of a wrecked Chevrolet

Sail away

Our day was composed of resemblances. Take
the heavy cloudbank as a mountain, as it lifted
itself up from behind the headland: how

its appearance altered to disintegrating
fluxive streaks as we spoke. We were sitting quietly
by the river as the colours changed.

And as we spoke — however gingerly — we knew
the blackbird in our voice, and watched it flying
there, high above the water, until our

conversation resembled its elusive song —
though it was the bird that sang amidst the rolls
of thunder and, as we listened, its notes

rose and fell around us on the ridiculous earth,
so that all we really saw was in the sky
of that electric evening. Maybe it was summer

and it was summer's shifting colours
through which our blackbird tumbled, as if evening
was not an imagined time: so in the orange

atmosphere the blackbird darted from my voice
to yours, and we almost held each other by the hand.
A breeze ran along the surface as if it was

a breeze, and the surface of the river
kicked against it, as if there was a tide coming in.
The blackbird sang as if it had a song.

Meaning

A black summer night, no moon, the thick air
drenched with honeysuckle and swamp gum.

In a pool of yellow torchlight
on a knife-blade, the brand name
Hickey Miffle—
I give in to meaninglessness, look up
try to read smudges of ink
a live squid squirts
across the seats – now the smell of the river hones
an edge inside my brain,
the night sky, Mallarmé's first drafts.

Who can I talk to now that you have left
the land of the living? The sound of more words.

The moon rolls out from the side of a mountain
and I decide to earn the rent;

the net pours into a thick chop,
a line of green fire running before the moon's light –

does four-inch mesh have anything to say tonight?

The mulloway might think so if they could –
Ah, Wordsworth, why were you so human?

On Friday nights I fork out comfort,
but tonight I work with holes, with absence.

I feed out a half-mile of mesh pulling the oars;
this comes once a life, a song without words
a human spider spinning a death web

across the bay. Alcohol, my friend my dark perversion,
here's to your damage:
who do you think you are?

My mother the belly dancer, my father Silence,
my house that repairs itself wherever I go.

In the night

The sheets are wrapped about me
I wake in a bad mood
you stand in the centre of it
It's been four days since I was with you
now you enter my dreams
in the same mood as I left you
petulant your head in
some old tantrum
I untangle myself and get up
then walk out into the dark house
my feet pad the cold
once again I hear the empty words
repeating promises vows a pledge
impossible charms against old age and despair
We have all our lives left to live through
why must watch ourselves
here in the present repeating our
selves our love hopeless
we hack away at our heads
our faces tense rubbing in the salt
our skin drawn the top lips
hanging loose
We have made the rendezvous
though each time we meet and touch
is another wound that will not heal
Why do we insist on being
real this way there is
a life each day the colours
surround us and at night we work
or sleep between television
and the bright moments of solitude
strange dreams of courage
I reach the kitchen moonlight
the smell of cooked meat
the luminous circle of the stove-clock
I turn and go back into
the living room
my family is sleeping I sit at my desk
and stare at the blue machine
In your house across the harbour
you wake turn on your side and curse me
Okay call me a ghost of a man

ROBERTA SYKES

1944c. – 2010

Roberta 'Bobbi' Sykes was born about 1944 in Townsville, Queensland. Raised by a white mother, she came to identify as an Aborigine in her teenage years (although this identification became controversial after her mother claimed Sykes' father was an African-American serviceman), and her experience of racism while growing up in far-north Queensland profoundly affected her. She attended St Patrick's College in Townsville, but left school at the age of 14 and worked as a nursing aid. At the age of 17 she was raped and became pregnant; her harrowing experience during this ordeal and the subsequent court trial is detailed in her critically acclaimed autobiography *Snake Dreaming*.

Sykes became involved in the Aboriginal Rights movement in Queensland in the 1960s. In 1971, she moved to Sydney, where she helped establish the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra, and later worked as an Education and Publicity Officer for the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service, becoming a counsellor and an adviser on Aboriginal health to the New South Wales government. During the 1970s she also worked as a freelance journalist and essayist, and began writing poetry. Her poems, along with her other writing, reflected her activism and critical stance on Australian society. Her first poetry collection, *Love Poems and Other Revolutionary Actions*, was published in 1979. It was republished twice: by the University of Queensland Press in 1988, and in a dual language German-English version in 1990.

In the late 1970s, an American professor visiting Australia met Sykes, and arranged for Harvard University to invite her to its postgraduate program. After raising funds through various community organisations, she left for the USA, and eventually completed both a Masters and PhD in Education at Harvard – becoming the first black Australian to be awarded a doctorate from an American university. On her return to Australia, she lectured at various tertiary institutions, and developed an international profile as a guest speaker as well as a writer. Her second volume of poetry, *Eclipse*, was published in 1996. Her three-volume autobiography *Snake Dreaming: Autobiography of a Black Woman* (2001) was initially published in the separate volumes *Snake Cradle* (1997), *Snake Dancing* (1998), and *Snake Circle* (2001).

Lament For The Strikers

I read /
In the papers this morning /
That you don't want /
No film made of the strike / 1957 / the good year /
And the reasons you give /
Is that bringing back the past /
Will only make trouble /
And you want for it to look /
Like that history didn't happen /
'Cause now you have your Housing Commission home /
And your job / a hundred dollars a week?
And white folks have forgot / or maybe just forgiven /
As long as you don't recall the ugly sore.

Brothers / don't you know that that was the day /
The day you took on your manhood /
Stood up / rattled your fetters / looked whitey in the eye /
That was the day you done right /
Said 'no more' to slavery, murder, rape /
Said 'no white man lives inside *this* Black skin' /
And you want for *that* to be as if it never did happen?

It is truth that they took you /
Manacled / guns held at temples /
from your home /
And it is truth /
That it looked like they had won /
But they didn't / because the fight continues /
Others fell in where you had been dragged out /

And it is truth that all this happened /
More than a thousand moons ago /
But yesterdays give us momentum for tomorrows.

How can you have forgotten /
The pride in your women's eyes /
Along with the worry

And how can you have forgotten /
That the blood and the tears in the street /
Were your own?

(The indecision of the strikers to re-enact the strike was reported in the southern media as definite. However, their revolutionary spirit prevailed, and the film '*Protected*' was made by Alessandro Cavadini in 1976. Despite constant threat of expulsion from Palm Island by the white manager and the D.A.I.A., either the strikers themselves or a close relative reenacted all parts in the film.)

From book: Love poems and other revolutionary actions

Moral Eclipse

(Dedicated to Koiki and Bonita Mabo)

This story has its genesis
In the past, so long ago,
A fleet of ships sailed across the sea
To a land they didn't know.

A thick pale cloud descended
When they landed on the shore
And for the Aborigines
Their idyllic paradise was no more.

Massacres and random killings,
Spear against gun, chances slim,
Babies' heads booted as playthings,
Black women raped on a whim.

After two hundred brutal years
With the outlook still quite grim,
Murris and the ancestral spirits
Were impatient for change to set in.

Though there'd been all manner of struggle,
Thousands of lives lost and spent,
Even an Aboriginal Embassy
In a ragged and torn canvas tent,

The colonial hearts remained hardened,
Thought "land rights" a bit of a joke,
Felt Aborigines should be grateful
That they'd merely loosened the yoke.

From the North, straight as an arrow,
Through all trials he would persevere,
A noble man with deep passion,
T'was only injustice he feared.

He set the pace with Native Title,
Turned Australia on its ear,
You could hear the roar across the country,
T'was Mabo's legacy they feared.

All he'd ever truly wanted
Was to leave his first born son
A little land on Island Mer
Which *his* father had passed on ...

And his grand-father before him
And back thru centuries in time,
But the colonial powers in Canberra said,
“You can't do that! It's mine.”

“Now, how can that be?”
Torres Islanders all wondered,
Tho they kept their cultural “cool”
In their hearts they really thundered ...

At the audacity and gall
Of the bureaucrats from hell
Who mailed up regular missives
And set their errand boys to tell ...

The natives that the soil they trod
Was no longer theirs to own
A message long reiterated
By successive Premiers — by phone.

For the colonisers in the south who claimed
That the land belonged to them
Hadn't even walked upon it
Nor left their footprint in the sand.

So Mabo chaffed and fretted
About the illegality he saw,
And in his every leisure moment,
He went pounding on any door.

He was looking for an answer,
To a question he found vexed,
Human rights and true morality
Had surely been eclipsed.

A millenium of Black ownership
Had been negated overnight,
But in the transfiguration
There'd been a major oversight ...

“Terra Nullius” was a falsehood,
A lie, right from the start,
And Mabo looking into it
Threatened to tear the lie apart.

Seven children filled his home up,
Tho' fairly bursting through the door,
Bonita and Koiki loved kids,
So they adopted a couple more.

He was at James Cook University,

Where he performed a modest task.
As a professor? Or a tutor?
No, they let him mow the grass.

He turned his hand to any work,
Did labouring of all kind.
That his money went on legal fees,
He mostly didn't mind.

But occasionally when a child was sick
Or had a special need,
He'd stretch to find the cash required;
But could not succumb to greed.

There were those who tried to stop him,
Tagged him "Black Commie" and "Red",
But they couldn't shake the notion
That was playing in his head.

He thought justice and compensation
Should flow when he was done,
But his strongest motivation?
To pass on his land to his first-born son.

Through all manner of deprivation,
He and his family suffered long,
But he held to his strong conviction
That "Terra Nullius" could be proved wrong.

It took a decade for him to decide
Upon the legal steps to take,
And another ten years passed before
We saw the difference he could make.

The High Court sat in judgment,
But they didn't make it quick,
And in the meantime we had heard
Koiki Mabo was very sick.

Upon his deathbed, he still fretted
About the outcome of his claim,
He was dead before the Court favoured him
With a decision in his name.

There was a pause — before pandemonium,
Aborigines quickly jumped to claim
Tribal lands across Australia
Previously stolen from them in shame.

Scaremongers split the country
Claimed the Court decision "too hard"

And had many suburban families
Worried about their own back yard.

Leader of the Country Party
Derided Aborigines from the start,
Said they didn't deserve to own their land
'Cause they hadn't built a wheeled cart.

But Prime Minister, Paul Keating,
Took a particularly different view,
“Because justice must be done”, he said,
“We'll have Native Title Courts for you”.

Koiki Mabo became a legend
When he was cold and in the ground,
Though “prior ownership” he established
Will eternally prove sound.

Some folks didn't like him
But they wear Mabo t-shirts now,
‘Cause he ran ahead to show the world
Australian Blacks were right — and proud!

The dear spirit of our dead Brother
Haunts white immorality in this land,
And the country can only be better
Because Mabo made his stand.

Identities: Who Am I?

I knew you'd ask me who am I.

Am I who they say I am?

Who do they say I am? I went looking back over some earlier press clippings — to see if *they* knew who I was. They said I was skinny and had knobbly knees — and they weren't wrong. But they also said I was angry and aggressive. I wondered what they meant by that.

Aggressive: Did they mean I wouldn't believe it when I was told — as I was so often told — that I had no value, no worth to this society?

And then I thought — no, when they wrote those sorts of things about me, they never even thought about who *I* was. They were writing about who they think *Blacks* are. And they weren't even writing about who we are as Blacks — they were writing about something in their own heads. They were writing about how *they* think they would feel — if they were Black. Strangely enough, they were identifying for themselves the logical response to being treated the way they were treating us.

Very circular, isn't it? But are they right?

Well, they might be right. They might be only partly right — and being partly right is much like being partly pregnant. Who I am is not only about my own experiences but also about the experiences of my community.

In that case, *Who am I?*

I am every Black woman who has ever been raped,
I am every Black woman who has ever been murdered,
Every Black girl who has ever been called “nigger”,
And every Black girl who has ever been called “slut”.

But racism is not as sexually specific as you might imagine. When the racists are out there, they're not too worried about gender. And my response to that is ... Well, it's probably predictable. When you see me, you ought to know that I am also —

Every Black man who's ever been whipped and beaten,
Every Black man who's been strung up in a cell,
Every Black youth turned down for a job,

And every Black boy confronting all the closed doors.

I am every Black boy who has seen his mother raped. I am every Black girl who has seen her father arrested and humiliated. I am every Black child taken away from their family.

Heavy though you may think this is — that's not all I am. I am not only the victim that white society has made of me.

I am every Black woman who has ever been loved —
laid the night through in sensual caring arms —
and every Black girl who has ever flirted,
who has danced, and known the wind and rain
on her skin and hair.

I am the woman of mystery in the night.
My eyes, too, have peeped from under the brim
of my pert hat,
Silk swirls loose and colourfully around me,
The scent of flowers lingers in my footsteps.

My low-cut black negligee is worn from use,
and see my scabby knees from climbing trees.
The fine-tooth comb dragged nits from my hair,
And my back is bent from scrubbing floors.

I am every Black man come in from a successful hunt
— brought joy and survival to my family in need —
Have carried my woman across water too dirty / too deep,
And every Black man in communion with God.

I have known both lust and passion
And murderous deeds I have done.
I have caught the blood-wet babe as it fell
From its safe place in the womb.

I am not merely who *you* want — or need — me to be. Racism
does not shape my every movement, does not prevent me
from feeling trickling sand move beneath my feet nor sun
beating warmly on my shoulders.

I am humble.
I am every Black person who has ever been wrong,
Who has ever said “sorry”, who has ever felt stupid,
Who has lost their way home / forgotten where they parked
their car / or arrived at the shop and not remembered what
they came out for.

I am every Black parent.
My child has won his race / come top in her exam /

been the beauty queen at the ball
and become a yuppy professional.

Of course, my child has also — been arrested / overdosed
on drugs / was found hanging in a cell / has been shot in
his bed / and came home unwed and pregnant. But that's
not all I am!

I am an ancient soul.
I have lived in Australia for a hundred thousand years,
With koalas and kangaroos as my meat and my friends.
Spirit forms know me and dwell in my Dreaming,
And every rock, tree and mountain knows me
And can call out my name.

I have seen the lights, the min-min lights,
I have spent a lifetime around a camp fire,
Huddled intimately over candle-lit dinner,
And watched bushfire eat trees and people.

I am a successful liar — I have to be
—in order to be a politician —
And a successful thief — to steal back
My country and the rights which were stolen from me.

I'm a land rights advocate
And an equal rights supporter,
A global citizen and educator,
An environmentalist and a human rights endorser.

And I've been alive long enough to know
That — to be all these things, and still live,
I have also had to be black and proud and strong.

So when you hear people say I'm just “angry and aggressive”,
you can chalk it up to them being strangers, and having very
limited imaginations and even smaller vocabularies.

ERIC BOGLE

b. 1944

Eric Bogle AM (born 23 September 1944, Peebles, Scotland) is a folk singer-songwriter. He emigrated to Australia in 1969 and currently resides near Adelaide, South Australia. On 25 January 1987, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his work as a singer-songwriter. In May 2001 the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA), as part of its 75th Anniversary celebrations, named his song, "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda", as one of the Top 30 Australian songs of all time.

Eric Bogle taught himself to play guitar and joined a skiffle and rock band. He was the leader of Eric and the Informers in Scotland. His early influences were Lonnie Donegan, Elvis Presley and Ewan MacColl. He turned to folk music prior to emigrating to Australia – his first written songs concerned his parents. When living in Canberra he joined the local folk music scene and performed occasionally.

Several of his most famous songs tell of the futility or loss of war. Prominent among these is "And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda", written in 1971. The lyrics tell of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) experience fighting in the Battle of Gallipoli. It has also been interpreted as a reaction to the Vietnam War. Another of his best-known songs, "No Man's Land", is also World War I-themed. This song is commonly known as "The Green Fields of France", a title it was first given by The Fureys, and which has subsequently been used in many further cover versions. The song refers to the traditional Scottish song "Flowers of the Forest" being played over the grave of a World War I soldier. This song has been remade by Alec Beaton (with a Scottish soldier from "The Water is Wide"), Plethyn ("Gwaed ar eu Dwylo" (Blood on their Hands), sung in Welsh from "Blas y Pridd"), and Hannes Wader ("Es ist an der Zeit" (It is the Time)). American folk singer Charlie Zahm also has a version on his album *Festival Favorites*, as does American Folk Singer Robert Marr on his 2011 album *Celticism*.

Another notable song on a similar theme, but with a more contemporary setting, is the Troubles-inspired "My Youngest Son Came Home Today", with its tale of a young man killed during fighting in Northern Ireland. Notably, the song does not take sides in the conflict; it does not mention whether the title character is Irish or British.

Bogle's songs cover a wide range of subjects and themes, including comedic songs ("The Aussie Bar-B-Q"), satires ("I Hate Wogs") protest songs and serious songs about the human condition such as "Now I'm Easy". His song "Safe in the Harbour" is an homage to Stan Rogers. "Katie and the Dreamtime Land" is a tribute to American folk singer Kate Wolf, who died from leukaemia in 1986. Other well-known songs, with lighter subject matter, include two homages to departed pets, "Little Gomez" and "Nobody's Moggy Now" and an acknowledgment of his folk music fans with "Do You Sing Any Dylan?".

And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

Now when I was a young man, I carried me pack, and I lived the free life of a rover.

From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback, well, I waltzed my Matilda all over.

Then in 1915, my country said son, "It's time you stopped rambling, there's work to be done."

So they gave me a tin hat, and they gave me a gun, and they marched me away to the war.

And the band played Waltzing Matilda, as the ship pulled away from the quay,
And amidst all the cheers, the flag-waving and tears, we sailed off for Gallipoli,
And how well I remember that terrible day, how our blood stained the sand and the water,

And of how in that hell that they called Suvla Bay, we were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.

Johnny Turk he was waiting, he'd primed himself well. He shower'd us with bullets,

And he rained us with shell. And in five minutes flat, he'd blown us all to hell,
Nearly blew us right back to Australia.

But the band played Waltzing Matilda, when we stopped to bury our slain.

We buried ours, and the Turks buried theirs, then we started all over again.

And those that were left, well we tried to survive, in that mad world of blood, death and fire

And for ten weary weeks, I kept myself alive, though around me the corpses piled higher.

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head, and when I woke up in my hospital bed,

And saw what it had done, well I wished I was dead. Never knew there was worse things than dyin'.

For I'll go no more waltzing Matilda, all around the green bush far and free,
To hump tent and pegs, a man needs both legs-no more waltzing Matilda for me.

So they gathered the crippled, the wounded, the maimed, and they shipped us back home to Australia.

The legless, the armless, the blind, the insane, those proud wounded heroes of Suvla,

And as our ship pulled into Circular Quay, I looked at the place where me legs used to be,

And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me, to grieve, to mourn, and to pity.

But the band played Waltzing Matilda, as they carried us down the gangway.

But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared, then they turned all their faces away.

And so now every April, I sit on me porch, and I watch the parades pass before me,

And I see my old comrades, how proudly they march, reviving old dreams of past glories,

And the old men march slowly, old bones stiff and sore. They're tired old heroes from a forgotten war

And the young people ask, what are they marching for? And I ask myself the same question.

But the band plays Waltzing Matilda, and the old men still answer the call,

But as year follows year, more old men disappear. Someday no one will march there at all.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda, who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?

And their ghosts may be heard as they march by that billabong, who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?

PETER SKRZYNECKI

b. 1945

Peter Skrzynecki was born 6 April 1945. He is an Australian poet of Polish and Ukrainian origin.

Born in Germany, Skrzynecki came to Australia with his parents in 1949, as a refugee from "the sorrow / Of northern wars" ("Crossing the Red Sea"). This voyage – a four-week-long sea expedition on the USS General R. M. Blatchford, a converted United States Navy transport ship, was the basis for many of the poems in his 1975 collection, *Immigrant Chronicle*.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of New England, and a Teachers Certificate from the Sydney Teachers College.

Skrzynecki has taught various courses relating to literature, including English Studies, American Literature, Australian Literature and Creative Writing. He has received several awards for his contributions to Australian and multicultural literature, including the Grace Leven Prize for Poetry in 1972 for *Headwaters*, the Captain Cook Bicentenary Poetry Prize, the Henry Lawson Short Story Award, an Order of Cultural Merit from the Polish government in 1989 and in 2002, an Order of Australia. Skrzynecki visits schools and gives lectures on the current topic area of *Immigrant Chronicle*.

The first poem Peter Skrzynecki remembers writing, in 1964, was called 'The guaranteed clock', a response to the death of Frank Partridge, who was the youngest Australian to be awarded the Victorian Cross in World War II. Partridge returned to his father's farm after the war and then became a national celebrity as the self-educated winner of the television show *Pick-A-Box*. Married late in life with a baby son, Partridge was using his winnings from the quiz show to build a home when he was killed in a car accident on the north coast of New South Wales. Skrzynecki writes, "I could not understand why this should have happened. I don't have a copy of the poem but the first line was 'We all see happiness and we all see sorrow/written on the face of a clock.'" While Skrzynecki is more often than not read as an exemplum of the 'migrant poet' in Australian poetry, it is his use of poetry to make sense of and accept the impermanence and mystery at the heart of everyday human experience that makes his work as a whole the slow and calming, often confronting, pleasure that it is.

I suppose I started to write poetry to help me make sense of my life, the circumstances that were guiding the direction that my life was taking . . . most of all, poetry gave me a sense of peace from tensions that I never fully understood about my birth (never having known my biological father) and the fact that my parents (Feliks was my adoptive father) chose Australia over Canada and South America to emigrate to after World War II. Poetry also became a way – though not immediately – to discover/praise God and the created world. I have always related to the natural world and it seems to me that my European heritage – both parents being from the land – contributed to this. Later, with marriage, and children, poetry became a way of trying to understand and appreciate relationships, and to give

thanks for the life of my family. I don't have brothers or sisters, so in a subliminal sense, poetry tried to reveal the mysteries of the world to a man who had often been a lonely child. Poetry was, and remains, ultimately a mystery. I don't think I chose it; but it chose me . . . Why ? I don't know.

Born in 1945, of Polish/Ukrainian background, Skrzynecki migrated to Australia with his family in 1949, arriving on the General Blatchford to be interned in a migrants' camp in Bathurst for two weeks and then settling at the Parkes Migrant Centre in central-western New South Wales. In 1951, the family moved to Regents Park in Sydney. His mother Kornelia worked as domestic help for families in Strathfield, while his adoptive father Feliks worked as a labourer for the Water Board. After completing high school, Peter studied at the University of Sydney for a year before enrolling at the Sydney Teachers' College, after which he took his first teaching placement at Jeogla on the New England Tablelands, the landscape of which has returned to through his work as a poet ever since. He then taught in the Colo River and Tweed River districts, before going on to complete a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Arts and a Master of Letters through the University of New England. Over the 1970s and 1980s he taught in the inner-west and south-west of Sydney, before joining the Milperra College of Advanced Education, now the University of Western Sydney, as a senior lecturer. He retired in 2005 and is now an adjunct associate professor in the School of Humanities and Languages.

A telling point to keep in mind, one that underscores the importance of the Australian landscape and Australian poetry in Skrzynecki's work, is that the first collection of poetry Skrzynecki bought in 1967 at Pigeon's Newsagency in Armidale (amazing to think you could buy collections of poetry in newsagencies in Australia in the 1960s!) was Judith Wright's *The Other Half*. Much of Skrzynecki's work calls to mind Wright's country, not simply as Jeogla itself was the next station along from Wright's childhood home of Wallamumbi, but as both find through poetry a way to dwell in relation to the land and its history. Skrzynecki's work also touches on themes common to Wright, not least the separation and communion of self and other, and the examination of mutability and memory (the "self that night undrowns when I'm asleep"). Skrzynecki writes, "Poetry makes us aware of our mortality when confronted with the mortality of others. At the end of 'Red trees' when I ask the question about the family that I once lived with in New England, there is a moment's peace. Asking the question brings that brief respite, but they remain hanging from the branches of the red trees. The further we enter into the mystery of life/death the deeper it takes us into ourselves."

While the experience of migration is a focal point of Skrzynecki's work, offering profound insights into the long-term experience of being Australian, it is not the only or the key focus of his work. What becomes overwhelmingly clear reading through poems such as 'Bushfires at Kunghur', 'Flying foxes', 'Repairing our shoes', 'Billycart days' and the more recent 'Red trees', is how broad-ranging the work is. It draws together the Australian pastoral with issues of memory and impermanence, mourning, family and love and Australian poetry itself, as well as the stories of migration that are interwoven throughout his work or more closely examined in poems such as 'Migrant Hostel', 'Sailing to Australia' and 'Mother and son'. Skrzynecki's work gives clear insight into how it is we might come to belong to, to dwell in rather than simply inhabit, Australia. It is an insight that seems lost on recent Australian governments with their dogwhistle politics and often xenophobic yapping about 'border protection', 'boat people' and 'Australian values'. It would not hurt contemporary Australian politicians to spend a minute or

two reading some of Skrzynecki's poems to be reminded of why the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was established.

As is always the case, poetry is political, though in Skrzynecki's case it is political without hectoring from a soap box or falling into didacticism. In his poetry, experience speak for itself. As much as the Displaced Persons Camp of 'Migrant Hotel' is a part of the Australian landscapes past (and present) on and off-shore detention facilities, a poem such as 'Hunting rabbits' shows the speaker taking part in that most basic initiation rite of Australian boyhood, "going shooting". When the young speaker concludes he was quick in "learning to walk and keep up with men/ who strode through strange hills/ as if their migration had still not come to an end", it is difficult not to feel the resonance with generations of children learning how to live in relation to the land and the sense of an as yet unended migration common to many non-indigenous Australians, from those claiming convict blood to the most recent asylum seekers trying to gain legal entitlements.

Poems such as 'Bushfires at Kunghur' can be easily read as part of the Australian pastoral tradition:

*The fires burned for weeks on end.
In paddocks where they were put out
logs smouldered for days afterwards.
Farmers talked about how long
before there was rain—this wasn't the west,
but north, east of the ranges,
away from flocks of nuisance galahs.*

*Water tanks were down, banana plantations
dying under a haze of smoke—
sunlight piercing weatherboards and tin roofs;
water being pumped from the creek
and river. Cattle, hand-fed in silence.*

While the issue of colonisation and territorialisation is always at issue in the pastoral tradition, especially the Australian pastoral in light of the conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous claims on and relations to the land, Skrzynecki's poetry cannot simply be read in terms of appropriation on the one hand or assimilation on the other. It is the interweaving of Skrzynecki's stories of migration and pastoral concerns that makes his work a fascinating, sometimes troubling, study in Australian becoming. A poem such as 'Billycart days' illustrates the process and the centrality of the Australian landscape on the speaker's understanding of self and relation to place that has grown from riding "the red dust roads as a kid/ in a billycart built from a fruitbox" (an image common to many Australian families regardless of origin) to the understanding almost a lifetime later of wholeness and belonging: "Fifty years later none of it's vanished/ because the red dust roads of Parkes/ run like blood in his veins." In this landscape, the ruins of the migrant camp he first arrived to remain, broken and bleached in the sun, alongside the echo in memory of both the children's laughter and the landscape presented in the cries of crows and galahs. Skrzynecki shows that rather than being alien and other, the migrant experience in its various forms is central to the evolution of whatever being 'Australian' will eventually mean.

In some ways, this use of poetry to find a way to dwell in, to find a place as part of the land's history, might be seen as a common ground to much of Australian

poetry, where many poets, particularly those arriving in the successive waves of colonisation since 1788, and living in a nation that still so often fails Australia's First Peoples and the nature of the land itself, might share in or recognise some aspect of Skrzynecki's rabbit hunters whose "migration had still not come to an end". These themes of migration and dwelling are not exceptional in themselves, but are rather a common thread that runs, twists, binds and turns in networks from Barron Field to Ouyang Yu or Martin Harrison. In a reversal of the theme of migration, the preoccupation in Australian poetry with Asia finds expression in Skrzynecki's work through the exquisite 'In Basho's house', which is a rare example of a poem that invokes the wiley old grandmaster without being smothered by a misplaced exotic.

And perhaps this is precisely why Skrzynecki's poetry succeeds, and why the pigeonholing of him as first and foremost mildly exotic as a migrant misrepresents him, as much as that misplaced exoticism misrepresents contemporary multicultural Australia. His work is demotic, conversational, open, even quotidian. In its expression and rhythms, the landscapes and experience it sets out, it is familiar and not exotic. According to Skrzynecki, he writes poetry "to express [him]self and continue to try and understand what my life is/was about. It has never been about money or status or importance. Poetry is that harbour, that refuge I can sail into and escape whatever storms come up. But it's not enough just to escape, you have to come to terms with loss, grief, love, the frailties of human nature to conquer those storms in their own heart of hearts . . . nothing lasts forever, good or bad. Poetry allows you to experience those struggles and epiphanies." While dealing with these central poetic concerns – love, memory and mourning – Skrzynecki has also written a longitudinal study of Australian becoming that offers a profound insight into the importance of Australian space and landscape, in how it is we come to belong and dwell.

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10 Mary Street

For nineteen years
We departed
Each morning, shut the house
Like a well-oiled lock,
Hid the key
Under a rusty bucket:
To school and work -
Over that still too-narrow bridge,
Around the factory
That was always burning down.

Back at 5p.m.
From the polite hum-drum of washing clothes
And laying sewerage pipes,
My parents watered
Plants - grew potatoes
And rows of sweet corn:
Tended roses and camellias
Like adopted children.
Home from school earlier
I'd ravage the backyard garden
Like a hungry bird -
Until, bursting at the seams
Of my little blue St Patrick's College cap,
I'd swear to stay off
Strawberries and peas forever.

The house stands
In its china-blue coat -
With paint guaranteed
For another ten years.
Lawns grow across
Dug-up beds of
Spinach, carrots and tomato.
(The whole block
Has been gazetted for industry).

For nineteen years
We lived together -
Kept pre-war Europe alive
With photographs and letters,
Heated discussions
And embracing gestures:
Visitors that ate Kielbasa, salt herrings
And rye bread, drank
Raw vodka or cherry brandy
And smoked like

A dozen Puffing Billies.

Naturalized more
Than a decade ago
We became citizens of the soil
That was feeding us –
Inheritors of a key
That'll open no house
When this one is pulled down.

St. Patrick's College

Impressed by the uniforms
of her employer's sons,
Mother enrolled me at St Pat's
With never a thought
To fees and expenses - wanting only
"What was best".

From the roof
Of the secondary school block
Our Lady watched
With outstretched arms,
Her face overshadowed by clouds.
Mother crossed herself
As she left me at the office –
Said a prayer
For my future intentions.
Under the principal's window
I stuck pine needles
Into the motto On my breast:
Luceat Lux Vestra
I thought was a brand of soap.

For eight years
I walked Strathfield's paths and streets,
Played chasings up and down
The station's ten ramps –
Caught the 414 bus
Like a foreign tourist,
Uncertain of my destination
Every time I got off.

For eight years
I carried the blue, black and gold
I'd been privileged to wear:
Learnt my conjugations
And Christian decorums for homework,
Was never too bright at science
But good at spelling;
Could say The Lord's Prayer
In Latin, all in one breath.

My last day there
Mass was offered up
For our departing intentions,
Our Lady still watching
Above, unchanged by eight years' weather.
With closed eyes

I fervently counted
The seventy-eight pages
Of my *Venice Adoremus*,
Saw equations I never understood
Rubbed off the blackboard,
Voices at bus stops, litanies and hymns
Taking the right-hand turn
Out of Edgar Street for good;
Prayed that Mother would someday be pleased
With what she'd got for her money –
That the darkness around me
Wasn't "for the best"
Before I let my light shine.

Sailing to Australia

1949

1

Tired, embittered,
wary of each other—
like men whose death sentences
have been commuted,
they turned their faces
from a shore
none of them could forget.

2

Leaving from
a Displaced Persons' Camp
in Germany,
we travelled south
by train into Italy.

Coming through Austria
I remember
walking between carriages,
seeing aeroplanes
lying broken in a forest—
their yellow and black
camouflage
like a butterfly's
torn wings.

3

Through grey mornings
and long afternoons of drizzle
we lay and talked
of graves that nobody
was prepared
to enter—
 argued
about war, disguised nationalities
and the absence of sea birds
from who we always watched.
And all the time
someone, sooner or later,
remarking:
'Nearly, nearly there.'

Though officially
tagged and photographed
to the satisfaction of braided uniforms

we had no names—
a tattooed number
or the gold fillings in a heart
to be disclosed only
to St Peter at The Gates.

For all it
mattered, where kinship
or affiliations
were concerned, each of us
could have been
an empty bullet shell
or prints left by a scavenger bird
around a piece of bone.
Each face became
a set of facts—
a situation
to be associated with
only while the voyage lasted.

4

Even the worst weather
became an ally
to whom confidences and sorrows
were readily confided—
disinherited, self-exiled,
homeless
as a river without banks,
people turned their backs and minds
upon the fallen godhead
of a country's majesty,
quietly embracing comfort
in every drop of salt
that crystallised into manna
on their tongues and in their eyes;
often, waiting until
the moon appeared
like a promised sign—
and the ship might leave the water
to a Castle of Dreams
in the clouds—
before they went to sleep.

5

On arrival,
a great uneasiness
filled the ship—
unspoken, misunderstood,
as a Union Jack
was hung
across the landing dock.

While the solemnity
of a basking sea lion
a government interpreter
held a loudspeaker at arm's length—
telling us, in
his own broken accents,
why we should feel proud
to have arrived,
without mishap, in Australia,
on Armistice Day.

Ancestors

Who are these shadows
That hang over you in a dream –
The bearded, faceless men
Standing shoulder to shoulder?

What secrets
Do they whisper into the darkness –
Why do their eyes
Never close?

Where do they point to

From the circle around you –
To what star
Do their footprints lead?

Behind them are
Mountains, the sound of a river,
A moonlit plain
Of grasses and sand.

Why do they
Never speak - how long
Is their wait to be?

Why do you wake
As their faces become clearer –
Your tongue dry
As caked mud?

From across the plain
Where sand and grasses never stir
The wind tastes of blood.

Billycart Days

He rode the red dust roads as a kid
in a billycart built from a fruitbox
along with other kids like himself
who lived on hope and laughter—
pointing their capguns at galahs and crows
that circled peppercorn trees
in a sky as blue as an exotic bird's eggshell.

Time was a neverending road that ran
between Parkes and the rest of the world:
Orange, Bathurst, Lithgow—
the beautiful Blue Mountains
he remembered crossing once
in a train that blew smoke from its funnel.
Beyond them lay Sydney and its harbour.

Barefoot, head-down, pushing along
one of his playmates from the migrant camp
he'd laugh to see the billycart
go freewheeling down a path or hill
as others tried to pile in—squealing
as the wheels wobbled and they couldn't stop
because it didn't have a break.

Dust in the eyes, dust in the mouth,
none of it mattered to them—
just as long as they were all together
at the end of those long hot days
and there was a drink of cold cordial for them.
It didn't matter who took the billycart home
because they'd all be back for it tomorrow.

Fifty years later none of it's vanished
because the red dust roads of Parkes
run like blood in his veins:
past the remains of the migrant camp
fenced off with steel posts and barbed wire—
whose concrete foundation slabs
lie broken and bleaching in the sun:

where thistles have been poisoned
so the site resembles a wasteland,
where there's no trace of the billycart
or the lives it carried—
but where the surrounding hills echo
with the cries of crows, galahs, children's laughter
as fragile as an exotic bird's eggshell.

© 1999, Peter Skrzynecki
From: Time's Revenge

Red Trees

Impossible not to see them
once you cross the railway bridge
and enter Memorial Avenue—
the rows of red trees
along the cemetery's perimeter:

maples, claret ash, liquid ambers—
cotoneasters where rosellas
hang upside-down and feast
on berries like clots of blood.

The breath of next month's winter
hangs over them already
but they seem intent on proving
that winter is a lie—
that neither winds nor frosts
are permanent afflictions
and disappear as quickly as they arrive.

A family that I once boarded with
at Jeogla lies buried
beside these trees—mother, father,
son, grandmother:
all "born and bred" in New England
where I came to work
and left when the work was done—
where I once considered
settling down but didn't
for reasons I still can't explain.

The mother dead at ninety-three years of age,
the father at seventy;
grandmother at eighty-five
and the son at twenty-four.
On his headstone
it reads, "Accidentally killed
16th February 1972."
All of them buried
In Loving Memory Of.
What can I do but pray ?
Or be content to live on the memory of a single day
when we sat down and ate a meal together ?

The wind pauses
and brings a moment's peace—
but still leaves my questions unanswered
hanging from the branches of red trees.

Leaving a ground strewn
with decaying leaves
I leave Memorial Avenue
and walk back towards the railway bridge.

The Horse of Achilles

After C.P. Cavafy

Yes, Poseidon was right—
he should never have given
his horses as a wedding gift
to Peleus, king of Phthia, who, in turn,
gave them to his son Achilles.

Achilles took them to the Trojan War
and his friend Patroclus
drove them into battle
against Hector who killed him.
According to Homer, the horses,
Balios and Xanthus, stopped,
stamped the ground,
stood over the body and wept.

What knowledge did they possess
that brought tears
to their immortal eyes—
or were they simply an extension
of Poseidon himself
who, somewhere under the sea,
wept for the mistake he made
in wasting an immortal gift on mortals?

Bushfires at Kunghur

The fires burned for weeks on end.
In paddocks where they were put out
logs smouldered for days afterwards.
Farmers talked about how long
before there was rain—this wasn't the west,
but north, east of the ranges,
away from flocks of nuisance galahs.

Water tanks were down, banana plantations
dying under a haze of smoke—
sunlight piercing weatherboards and tin roofs;
water being pumped from the creek
and river. Cattle, hand-fed in silence.

This day the lizards were out
in dozens: heads up, immobile like an Aztec warrior
with a frilled ornament around its neck,
one would rear up and flee on its back legs
as your approaching wheels broke the dome
of sunlight protecting it.

As evening fell the wind turned west.
Fires dotted the range
like rubies in Persephone's crown—
men returned by ashes and soil,
cursing fire-breaks and ruined crops.

Little pepper-grey moths flew out of the bushes,
desperate against the cold panes, thirsty for light.

© 1972, *Peter Skrzynecki*
From: Headwaters

ROBERT GRAY

b. 1945

Robert Gray was born in Coffs Harbour, a small town on the north coast of New South Wales. In the 1970s, he settled in Sydney, where he still lives. His love of the countryside of his native region, his interest in poetry, Zen-Buddhism and painting formed early on a counterweight to his precarious family situation, about which he writes for the first time – frankly and with much humour – in his autobiographical prose work *A Light in the Porch* (due to appear later in 2008). His father, an alcoholic and a disillusioned intellectual, was banished from Sydney by his well-to-do family to a small banana plantation in ‘the distant north’, a plantation which, after he had laboriously farmed it for a few years, he lost in a wager when Robert Gray was about ten years old. His mother, on the other hand, a farmer’s daughter from the area, was an enthusiastic member of the local Jehovah’s Witnesses.

This sums up much of what Gray is not, and his poetry is characterised, among other things, precisely by a kind of sobriety, lucidity and reverence for sensory perception, in which – as an autodidact – he refers to such sources as Aristotle, modern science and Buddhism.

Gray also draws and paints, though purely as an amateur, and sees this occupation as a natural complement to the writing of poetry: “Writing becomes inward. Drawing is like going out into the world again. It’s like going outdoors. I return to words freshened with a determination to relate them closer to things, not to be caught up in opaque and self-absorbed language.”

About his first experiencing the phenomenon of ‘poetry’ Gray says, “It was the image that led me to poetry (the image in the form of analogy). When I was twelve, I experienced an epiphany, as the teacher was reading to us from that wonderfully Keatsian book *The Wind in the Willows*. He read a description of the Mole and the Water Rat at breakfast. Mole was eating hot toast, through which the butter was described as dripping ‘like honey out of the honeycomb’.” Suddenly, Gray noticed, he saw something razor-sharp in his mind’s eye that he actually must have looked at often – without ever really having seen it. “I saw that we can perceive more fully in a work of art, when we are lifted out of the ‘buzzing, blooming confusion of life’, than we can ordinarily, and so I decided to write poems.”

With his poetry debut *Creekwater Journal* (1973) Robert Gray at once established his name as a highly skilful and original ‘imagist’. Even Les Murray, who had until then staunchly refused to review the work of a fellow-Australian, was moved to write: “Mr Gray has an eye, and the verbal felicity which must accompany such an eye. He can use an epithet and image to perfection and catch a whole world of sensory understanding in a word or a phrase.” In illustration, he quoted one of Gray’s haiku-like three-liners: “4 a.m. the Milky Way is blown along / high over the forest. / A truck changes down.” Murray, however, also wondered if Gray’s talent for impressions of such hallucinatory clarity would not hamper his further development as a poet and keep him from taking on more complex themes. Murray’s fears turned out to be unfounded. Apart from pure nature poetry – the play of water and light in Sydney Harbour is a recurrent theme – there are discursive and narrative poems to be found in all his collections, such as the famous ‘Flames and Dangling Wire’ – about a visit to a garbage dump – or ‘Diptych’, which paints a moving portrait of his parents.

“Things as they are are what is mystical,” says Gray in ‘A Testimony’ (in *Lineations*, 1996), “Those who search deepest are returned to life . . . What is most needed is that we become more modest. And the work of art that can return us to our senses.” This modesty feeds a poetic craftsmanship of rare integrity. As Les Murray later noted, “Robert Gray is one of the contemporary masters of poetry in English.”

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A Bowl of Pears

Swarthy as oilcloth and as squat
as Sancho Panza
wearing a beret's little stalk
the pear

itself suggests the application of some rigour
the finest blade
from the knife drawer
here

to freshen it is one slice and then another
the north fall south fall
facets of glacier
the snow-clean juice with a slight crunch that is sweet

I find lintels and plinths of white marble
clean angled
where there slides
the perfume globule

a freshness
like the breeze that is felt upon
the opening
of day's fan

Enku
sculptor of pine stumps
revealed the ten thousand Buddhas with his attacks
the calligraphic axe

Rationalised shape shaped with vertical strokes
I have made of your jowled
buttocks
a squareness neatly pelvic

A Sunday of rain
and like a drain
a pipe that was agog and is chock-a-block the limber thunder
rebounds
and bounds

it comes pouring down
a funnel the wrong way around
broadcasts
its buffoon militance over the houses all afternoon

Undone

the laces of rain
dangle on the windows
now slicing iron

a butcher is sharpening
the light
of his favourite knife
its shimmers carving stripes into the garden

And I have carved the pear-shaped head
with eyes
close set
as pips that Picasso saw his poor

friend who had gone
to war
a cubist
snowman the fragrant and fatal Apollinaire

Wing-Beat

In some last inventory, I'll have lost a season
through the occlusion
of summer by another hemisphere.
Going there
the winter tolls twice
across the year. The leaves of ice
in their manuscripts
are shelved on the air and each sifts
fine as paper-cuts along the wind. I will go
to crippled snow
moving through the crossings, in the headlights
of early nights.
How glorious summer is to them
who have caught just a glimpse of its billowing hem.
'Fifty springs are little room,' an authority
in loss warns, but actuarially
I can expect to own
ten summers, before the heights of blue close down.
Although I've gone
northwards, I shall cross the lawn
at home – the trees and yard in bloom –
in the mirror in an empty room.

Twilight

These long stars
on

stalks
that have grown up

early
and are like

water
plants and that stand

in all
the pools and the lake

even
at the brim

of
the dark cup

before
your mouth these are

the one
slit star

Harbour Dusk

She and I came wandering there through an empty park,
and we laid our hands on a stone parapet's
fading life. Before us, across the oily, aubergine dark
of the harbour, we could make out yachts –

beneath an overcast sky, that was mauve underlit,
against a far shore of dark, crumbling bush.
Part of the city, to our left, was fruit shop bright.
After the summer day, a huge, moist hush.

The yachts were far across their empty fields of water.
One, at times, was gently rested like a quill.
They seemed to whisper, slipping amongst each other,
always hovering, as though resolve were ill.

Away off, through the strung Bridge, a sky of mulberry
and orange chiffon. Mauve-grey, each sloven sail –
like nursing sisters in a deep corridor, some melancholy;
or nuns, going to an evening confessional.

In Departing Light

My mother all of ninety has to be tied up
in her wheelchair, but still she leans far out of it sideways;
she juts there brokenly,
able to cut
with the sight of her someone who is close. She is hung
like her hanging mouth
in the dignity
of her bleariness, and says that she is
perfectly all right. It is impossible to get her to complain
or to register anything
for longer than a moment. She has made Stephen Hawking look healthy.
It's as though
she is being sucked out of existence sideways through a porthole
and we've got hold of her feet.
She's very calm.
If you live long enough it isn't death you fear
but what life can still do. And she appears to know this
somewhere,
even if there's no hope she could formulate it.
Yet she is so calm you think of an immortal – a Tithonus withering
forever on the edge
of life,
though never a moment's grievance. Taken out to air
my mother seems in a motorcycle race, she
the sidecar passenger
who keeps the machine on the road, trying to lie far over
beyond the wheel.
Seriously, concentrated, she gazes ahead
towards the line,
as we go creeping around and around, through the thick syrups
of a garden, behind the nursing home.
Her mouth is full of chaos.
My mother revolves her loose dentures like marbles ground upon each other,
or idly clatters them,
broken and chipped. Since they won't stay on her gums
she spits them free
with a sudden blurting cough, which seems to have stamped out of her
an ultimate breath.
Her teeth fly into her lap or onto the grass,
breaking the hawsers of spittle.
What we see in such age is for us the premature dissolution of a body,
as it slips off the bones
and back to protoplasm
before it can be decently hidden away.
And it's as though the synapses were almost all of them broken
between her brain cells
and now they waver about feebly on the draught of my voice

and connect
at random and wrongly
and she has become a surrealist poet.
'How is the sun
on your back?' I ask. 'The sun
is mechanical,' she tells me, matter of fact. Wait
a moment, I think, is she
becoming profound? From nowhere she says, 'The lake gets dusty.' There is no
lake
here, or in her past. 'You'll have to dust the lake.'
It could be
She has grown deep, but then she says, 'The little boy in the star is food,'
or perhaps 'The little boy is the star in food,'
and you think, 'More likely
this appeals to my kind of superstition.' It is all a tangle, and interpretations,
and hearing amiss,
all just the slipperiness
of her descent.

We sit and listen to the bird-song, which is like wandering lines
of wet paint –
it is like an abstract expressionist at work, his flourishes and
then
the touches
barely there,
and is going on all over the stretched sky.
If I read aloud skimmingly from the newspaper, she immediately falls asleep.
I stroke her face and she wakes
and looking at me intently she says something like, 'That was
a nice stick.' In our sitting about
she has also said, relevant of nothing, 'The desert is a tongue.'
'A red tongue?'
'That's right, it's a
it's a sort of
you know – it's a – it's a long
motor car.'
When I told her I might go to Cambridge for a time, she said to me, 'Cambridge
is a very old seat of learning. Be sure –'
but it became too much –
'be sure
of the short Christmas flowers.' I get dizzy,
nauseous,
when I try to think about what is happening inside her head. I keep her
out there for hours, propping her
straight, as
she dozes, and drifts into waking; away from the stench and
the screams of the ward. The worst
of all this, for me, is that despite such talk, now is the most peace
I've known her to have. She reminisces,
momentarily, thinking that I am one of her long-dead
brothers. 'Didn't we have some fun

on those horses, when we were kids?’ she’ll say, giving
her thigh a little slap. Alzheimer’s
is nirvana, in her case. She never mentions
anything of what troubled her adult years – God, the evil passages
of the Bible, her own mother’s
long, hard dying, my father. Nothing
at all of my father,
and nothing
of her obsession with the religion that he drove her to. She says the magpie’s
song,
which goes on and on, like an Irishman
wheedling to himself,
and which I have turned her chair towards,
reminds her of
a cup. A broken cup. I think that the chaos in her mind
is bearable to her because it is revolving
so slowly – slowly
as dust motes in an empty room.
The soul? The soul has long been defeated, and is all but gone.
She’s only productive now
of bristles on the chin, of an odour
like old newspapers on a damp concrete floor, of garbled mutterings, of
some crackling memories, and of a warmth
(it was always there,
the marsupial devotion), of a warmth that is just in the eyes now, particularly
when I hold her and rock her for a while, as I lift her
back to bed – a folded
package, such as,
I have seen from photographs, was made of the Ice Man. She says, ‘I like it
when you – when
when
you...’
I say to her, ‘My brown-eyed girl.’ Although she doesn’t remember
the record, or me come home
that time, I sing it
to her: ‘Da
da-dum, de-dum, da-dum ... And
it’s you, it’s you,’ – she smiles up, into my face – ‘it’s you, my brown-eyed girl.’

My mother will get lost on the roads after death.
Too lonely a figure
to bear thinking of. As she did once,
one time at least, in the new department store
in our town; discovered
hesitant among the aisles; turning around and around, becoming
a still place.
Looking too kind
to reject even a wrong direction,
outrightly. And she caught my eye, watching her,
and knew I’d laugh

and grinned. Or else, since many another spirit will be arriving over there,
whatever
those are – and all of them clamorous
as seabirds, along the walls of death – she will be pushed aside
easily, again. There are hierarchies in Heaven, we remember; and we know
of its bungled schemes.
Even if the last shall be first', as we have been told, she
could not be first. It would not be her.
But why become so fearful?
This is all
of your mother, in your arms. She who now, a moment after your game, has
gone;
who is confused
and would like to ask
why she is hanging here. No – she will be safe. She will be safe
in the dry mouth
of this red earth, in the place
she has always been. She
who hasn't survived living, how can we dream that she will survive her death?

JOANNE BURNS

b. 1945

joanne burns was born in Vacluse, Sydney, in 1945, and grew up in Sydney's eastern suburbs. She graduated from the University of Sydney in 1966 and subsequently worked as an English teacher in New South Wales, and for a time in London. She has also taught creative writing in tertiary institutions, schools, and community organisations.

burns' first collection of poems, *Snatch*, was published in London in 1972. Since then she has published more than a dozen further books of poetry, and her poems have appeared in numerous Australian literary journals and poetry magazines. She has been particularly concerned with the blurring of the distinctions between poetry and prose in her work, and has written extensively in prose poem/ microfiction forms. She has also written monologues and short futurist fictions and 'farables' (fables/ parables).

moonphrases or/mostly you are invisible

mostly you are invisible
but make precise appearance
occasionally
like some Shakespeare ghost
lacking an annotated script

manifesting yrself

in quarters
in sometimes halves(so cautiously)

at a pertinent position
inside my blackskied dream

and if i would
refuse yr beam
yr silvercoated code
of literary illusion

i am eclipsed

on a clear day

something was happening inside her left ear. and what bothered her most was the fact that she could neither look nor climb into it to see what was going on. it wasn't a matter of visiting a g.p. for a diagnosis or treatment of this ear. for she liked what she thought was happening in there but she did at times get frustrated having to be on the outside of her body denied real access to the occurrences within that chamber. year after year the existence of a more satisfactory world than the present one pressed itself upon her imagination. she caught glimpses of it, sensations of its rhythms within this ear of hers but its certainty tended to elude her, to really remain in the vicinity of light years away, particularly after a cleaning session with cotton buds from which emerged nothing more evidential than the yellow smears of wax. but the profanity of these discharges dampened her enthusiasm only for as many moments as it took to drop these buds into the wastebin and walk out of the bathroom. for she had faith and belief in her hunches about the true character of her inner ear. on a clear day she could see, with eyes open or closed, whether washing up, dusting, waiting for a train, or standing in a supermarket queue, an image of this place within. it held an unusually deep and calm sea containing all the moods of blueness. it was neither cold nor exposed, but perfectly temperatured, with a surface of small waves rippling in their ripplingest way. utopian waves. she felt she knew this place though she'd never actually been there, and within its waters were grottoes and large, soft rocks: benign custodians of an aqueous, bottomless world. as she looked she realised this was a place where she could stay forever without realising it was forever. she could lounge about, lazily treading water or float on her back like a lotus eater. she saw glimpses of this possibility as she sharpened her focus. there would be other people bobbing up and down in this sea with their heads covered in various coloured caps, there would be plenty of room for everyone to feel their individuality, everyone would smile at each other but never speak. it was the enormous depth of this sea that thrilled her most. it presented to her the possibility of release from some terrible nameless burden. but she still remained on the outside of this vision, this apparition. she was on the outside looking in. confined in her worldly body. she had read in many paperbacks that the corporeal body was merely an illusion, a sheath one discarded in time. but when. what she felt impelled to do, if it were in some way possible, was to climb up to her ear, and poised on the edge, the rim of her inner ear, dive perfectly into this sea. but she had a fear of diving due to a childhood injury, and somehow jumping was, if not suicidal, at least graceless. sometimes after a plane flight, when her ears began to unblock in the arrival lounge of an airport she would feel a tearing, a ripping in her left ear like the unwrapping, the opening of a large gift being offered to her, but she knew this was really a false hope. it wasn't reasonable to be received into this other watery world with such ease. and it wouldn't be right to disappear in front of everyone when she'd just arrived. such hopes of dematerialisation were just fanciful. she would just have to be patient. in the meantime she decided to protect herself from the invasion of extraneous sounds by the wearing of an earplug. she had begun to have premonitions of the approachings of loads of tourists comfortably draped around the edges of glassbottomed speedboats

hegemonies

the monolingual assume their language is godspeak. those whose only language is english, with maybe a sprinkling of pidgin french, believe they can travel the world in righteous ease. they open their mouths to present their letters of credit.

mandarin. hindi. japanese. russian. arabic. greek. not merely other languages but foreign alphabets. here is a newspaper for each one of them. go on. have a look. you can recognise something sensible only in the photographs. now force yourself to look as if you are reading one or two of these papers. then you will detect the fugitive in your eyes, the panic in your heart. face the fact. you're just another illiterate.

to have learnt running writing. never feeling satisfied with your own version of the regulation script. copying the styles of the sophisticates in the class. with their parker pens. when you only had a conway stewart. copying their signatures; practising your own; copying their individualities and flourishes. soon becoming aware of the connection between imitation and suffocation. experimenting with letters, strokes. writing backwards. doing a latin test using your left hand. the nun banging her white knuckles on your work, unable to accept the way you write between the lines. why don't you write on the lines she declares. you stare at the gold of god's wedding ring on her fist. 'i don't know, sister walburger'.

dip-in pens. bottles of ink with strange names. onoto, quink. bottles that leak, haemorrhage over everything. wilful ink that trickles down nibs and spreads round the words in puddles. 'this is the work of a pig, this' screams sister reparata to the girl who has priests, monsignors, and reverend mothers in her family.

during the rosary after lunch someone throws a pen as if it is a dart. the nib spikes the right index finger of a girl who in thirty years time will be in the gossip pages of the daily mirror dancing at a los angeles nite club with sylvester stallone.

how many times hasn't someone explained the illegibility of doctors' handwriting with the excuse that their writing got that way because of the speed with which they were forced to take notes at university.

and who will suggest that the doctor's scribble on your records, on your prescriptions, is deliberately cryptic, a secret code devised to discourage false notions of equality; to incapacitate.

"after i had my stroke" she said, "i couldn't even read the words 'cat' and 'mat'. three years later it took me a day to write a sentence."

"not only was i paralysed down my left side" he said, "i also lost a lifetime of clues. when the therapist asked me if a stone would sink in water i said 'no, i don't think so.' and then she said 'well then. is two pounds of sugar more than one pound?' i just shook my head."

for quite a time we take a lot for granted. and then we start to wonder. when will our sight begin to fail. our hearing get weaker. will the blood in our vessels continue to run smoothly to our brains. for how many years might we have to live without these faculties. how will it be for us. how would we react in such altered circumstances.

have you ever noticed how an additional letter can slip into the words that you write. who is the rebel here. you, the pen, or the language itself. and the reader is so tolerant.

small children are learning to write stories. small stories the length of one sentence. small stories written in huge letters. six or seven words take up all the

space on a large sheet of paper the teacher has given each of them. it is computer paper. the children are very excited. all of them want to read out their stories. they rustle their sheets of paper in anticipation. one child begins to read her sentence. she leans her head forward into her writing. her voice is so slow as she sounds out each word. she looks through the large shapes of her letters as if she is looking out through the windows in an aeroplane. as if the world looks intensely new and different.

in the story 'susie and the alphabet' seven letters go to hospital with pneumonia. it is susie's fault. she makes these letters so very fat and writes them down as if they are climbing up a steep hill. they become exhausted and sweat so much in the cold and windy climate they fall ill. susie visits them in hospital. she apologises and promises to learn to write better.

'you'd better mean what you say' the letters reply.

observe the difference between the formal signatures of persons who appear significant through the suave manipulations of pens, and the physical appearances of these same persons. the lack of resemblance may be striking.

they love to print. they sit and copy the poem from the board. lines of clearly shaped letters on white art paper. a poster poem. it's better not to look too closely at the words. letters have been dropped or added, vowels reversed and whole lines left out. but they like this activity. this copying. and the class is quiet. it is like being in a church. then george grabs the plastic lettering stencil he wants for his heading from a girl opposite. as she protests he calls her a slut. although he leaves a letter out of the poem's title, which is large and red, he knows it looks quite good and punches a boy who disagrees. george aged eleven cannot read much of what he has copied down and he is not the only one. though some are skilled at guessing. those who read well do so reluctantly. for everyone is packing up. the bell is about to ring. they all must hurry home in time for the cartoons. it's urgent, someone first at the door, says.

this manuscript of persian. delicate language you need only look at. no reason to inquire as to the meaning of each sign. see here instead these shapes and lines that swoop and curve; that dive and slide. shapes that satisfy in their suggestions. the eye turns to music. we may dream inside this silent and cryptic lyric. no reading lessons required.

australia

she was going snorkelling for scallops. she went most sundays in the summer. soft fleshy scallops made a great meal on warm dreamy sunday nights. the local papers said the day would be fine and mild. a nice day for the children to play on the beach, building sandcastles while she and her husband were in the water. they had four young daughters. they were hoping for a son in eight months time. five children would be enough to manage they had decided. it made the future easier to plan for.

the national papers the next morning reported that she had been taken by a huge shark. there had been a splash. she had been bitten in half. a retired fisherman watching from a cliff said he saw a big spray and red froth and bubbles. he said the shark was longer than a rescue boat. there were no remains of her; just one of the flippers. this absence of human remains was unprecedented.

the newspapers said her four young daughters had stood far away on the shore watching. they had been building a moat for their sandcastle. the report said the girls were one hundred and fifty metres away; that the father was two hundred metres away; the papers said the shark was six metres long. the newspapers were full of figures. as if someone was desperate to fill in the gaps.

for the next few nights right across the nation people's dreams were full of strange and terrible holes; while the pacific ocean remained blue in every atlas in the world

a later page

(*not quite after Elizabeth Bishop's 'In the Waiting Room'*)

i didn't have an existential moment
(epiphanic?) at the dentist in my childhood
—unlike elizabeth bishop when she examined
the *national geographic* in a waiting room
in wartime worcester, massachusetts,
february 1918—while her aunt was in
'the chair'; a visit to the dentist in sydney
town, corner pitt & market, was almost
entertainment—'he' was only uncle bob,
virtual in-law, whose laugh and haircut
evoked bob hope for me; i didn't mind
the climb up to the chair in the creamy
surgery with its enamel gloss that sheen
of instruments in rows a floor or so above
the benign world of *shirley shoes*, the city
gleamed just outside the window while
he might probe and prod; it was the cold
war years but my seven year old veins were
warm with scents of post-appointment pleasure:
a restaurant visit, tour of bright department stores,
a trip to the arcane library, its rich, urgent papersmell,
the return journey boarded from a tram circling (like gold)
queen victoria's statue at queens square

there was the *saturday evening post* and maybe
the new yorker in the modest waiting room, nothing
to alarm me—or perhaps the wait was pretty short
at uncle bob's; instead a copy of *the saturday book*
belonging to my parents became the rite of passage,
realisation for me: sick in bed i trawled through it
gazing at the pics—a secret strobe of joy viewing cancan
dancers kicking up their legs then that sudden endless
moment on a later page: a group of people at the races, edwardian
i think, laughing laughing at the camera but i believed entirely
that they laughed at me weak and maybe measly in my mother's
bed no asylum underneath the sheets, that arabian tent illusion
had outgrown its glamour at least a year before

a mercurial terror i would jolt into
on reaching *love locked out* while
browsing an old book of national gallery
illustrations 1926 never lasted long
(the backview of a naked boy outside
a heavy metal door like a frozen metaphor)

but those sharp eyes and mouths of racy laughter
bouncing off the walls dismissive and derisive
drill through collapsing years

KEV CARMODY

b. 1946

Kevin Daniel "Kev" Carmody (born 1946, Cairns, Queensland) is an Indigenous Australian singer-songwriter. His song "From Little Things Big Things Grow" was recorded with co-writer Paul Kelly for their 1993 single.

Kev Carmody was born in 1946 in Cairns, Queensland. His father was a second-generation Irish descendant, his mother an Indigenous Australian of the Murri people. His younger brother, Laurie, was born three and a half years later. His family moved to southern Queensland in early 1950, and he grew up on a cattle station near Goranba, 70 km west of Dalby in the Darling Downs area of south eastern Queensland. His parents worked as drovers, moving cattle along stock routes. At ten years of age, Carmody and his brother were taken from their parents under the assimilation policy as part of the Stolen Generations and sent to a Christian school in Toowoomba. After schooling, he returned to his rural roots and worked for seventeen years as a country labourer, including droving, shearing, bag lumping, wool pressing and welding.

In 1967 he married Helen, with whom he has three sons; they later divorced but remain "good mates". In 1978, at the age of 33, Carmody enrolled in university, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education.

At the night time I was always just interested in music, so I started to study music (by himself) and got to a standard, when I moved to Toowoomba and got a proper music teacher. And she said to me, 'you know, you're miles ahead of the standard they'd require to get into the music course at the University of Southern Queensland.

—Kev Carmody

Due to his limited schooling, Carmody's reading and writing skills were not up to required university standard. Undeterred, he suggested to the history tutor that until his writing was suitable he would present his research in a musical format accompanied by guitar. Whilst this was a novel approach at university, it was in line with the far older indigenous tradition of oral history. Although Carmody had extensive historical knowledge, learnt by oral traditions, much of it could not be found in library history books and was attributed to 'unpublished works'. Carmody completed his Bachelor of Arts degree, then postgraduate studies and a Diploma of Education at the University of Queensland, followed by commencing a PhD in History, on the Darling Downs 1830–1860.

I was supposed to be studying history and music, but I'd be in the library with books on everything, geology, theorems of thermodynamics. I wished I'd had the time to take every course.

—Kev Carmody

Whilst at university, Carmody had used music as a means of implementing oral history in tutorials, which led to his later career.

In the early 1980s, Carmody began his musical career. He signed a recording contract in 1987 and his first album, *Pillars of Society*, was released on the Rutabagas label (a label founded by artist Frances Mahony and technologist Joe Hayes); the rights were later transferred to Larrikin Records/EMI in December 1988. It drew heavily upon country and folk styles with tracks such as "Black Deaths in Custody" and "Thou Shalt Not Steal" describing ignorance and oppression experienced by indigenous Australians. In the song "Thou Shalt Not Steal", Carmody draws attention to the hypocrisy of British settlers who brought Christianity to indigenous Australians, including the commandment prohibiting theft, and yet took the land that the Aboriginal people had inhabited for more than 60,000 years. He emphasises the importance of land to the indigenous people, "The land's our heritage and spirit", and turns the Christian lesson given to indigenous people around: "We say to you yes, whiteman, thou shalt not steal". A *Rolling Stone* (Australia) journalist, Bruce Elder, described it as "the best album ever released by an Aboriginal musician and arguably the best protest album ever made in Australia". In subsequent recordings Carmody adopted a broad range of musical styles, from reggae to rock and roll.

That first album was acoustic because we didn't have enough money for anything else, but as I went on, I was always exploring sound. One of the things he [Carmody's grandfather] said to us was, you have to learn to listen to the wind. What he was saying was, use your imagination, widen it out, be aware of things around you. You learn to listen in another way. That's the key to my music. Just opening up to that sensory perception of sound.

—Kev Carmody

Carmody's second album, *Eulogy (For a Black Person)*, released in November 1990, was produced by Connolly, with musical support from the rest of the Messengers and members of pioneering Aboriginal rock band Mixed Relations. A review of the album noted that "*Using a combination of folk and country music his hard-hitting lyrics deal with such potent material as the David Gundy slaying, black deaths in custody, land rights and Aboriginal pride and dignity. Carmody is deeply committed, powerfully intelligent and persuasively provocative. He uses images of revolutionaries... and challenges white Australia to stare unrelentingly at the despair which under pins Aboriginal society*". The first single from the album, "Blood Red Rose", released in April 1992, was described by Carmody as "a comment on personal isolation. Late night, big city alienation", whilst the B-side, "Elly", is the moving story of a young woman attempting to escape the poverty and racism of western Queensland, who finds herself trapped in Surfers Paradise working in the sex industry.

Early in 1991 Carmody co-wrote a song, "From Little Things Big Things Grow", with Paul Kelly; it was an historical account of the Gurindji tribe drovers' walkout led by Vincent Lingiari at Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory during the 1960s, the incident which sparked off the indigenous land rights movement. It was first recorded by Paul Kelly & the Messengers on Comedy in May and included Steve Connolly as guitarist of the Messengers. Carmody's third album, *Bloodlines*, was released in July 1993 and included his own version of "From Little Things Big Things Grow", with Kelly guesting on vocals, which was issued as a single. Also in 1993 Carmody was the subject of a musical documentary, *Blood Brothers - From Little Things Big Things Grow*, by Rachel Perkins and directed by Trevor Graham, which explored Carmody's life, using music clips and

historical footage.

After the release of his fourth album, *Images And Illusions*, in September 1995, produced by Steve Kilbey of The Church, Carmody re-evaluated his life and career, reducing the demands placed on him by the mainstream recording industry. He continued performing, as a musician and public speaker, to audiences as diverse as the National Press Club and Aboriginal Australians in prison.

2000 saw the release of *Messages* a compilation of songs from Carmody's first four albums. In 2001, together with Kelly, Mairead Hannan, John Romeril, Deirdre Hannan and Alice Garner, Carmody assisted in writing the musical score for the Australian film *One Night the Moon*. The soundtrack won a Screen Music Award at the 2002 Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA)/Australian Guild of Screen Composers (AGSC) Awards.

After a break of nearly ten years Carmody finally released a new album in 2004. The album, *Mirrors*, was completely self-financed and distributed. It was recorded at a friend's property "down the road" and was his first album recorded with computer technology. The songs on *Mirrors* cover a range of contemporary issues including refugee treatment and his thoughts on United States President George W. Bush, accompanied by the captured real life sounds of the Australian bush.

In 2007, Kelly organised the double CD, *Cannot Buy My Soul - The Songs of Kev Carmody*, with tribute songs by various artists on one disc and a second disc of songs by Carmody himself.

I first heard his music 20 years ago, and was drawn straight away to his blend of politics and prayer, poetry, anger and pride. His body of work is one of our great cultural treasures.

—Paul Kelly

On 31 October, Carmody was a special guest at the TV music channel MAX's "The Max Sessions: Powderfinger, Concert For The Cure" singing alongside front man Bernard Fanning to the controversial "Black Tears" and also joined in with the encore of "These Days". The concert was a fundraiser and thank you to the "unsung heroes" of breast cancer with an invitation-only audience made up of a special group of people – those who have suffered and survived breast cancer and their support networks. The concert closed Breast Cancer Awareness Month and was the brainchild of 20-year-old Nick Vindin, who had lost his mother Kate to the disease a few years earlier.

In the aftermath of the Australian Labor Government's 2008 apology to indigenous Australians, Carmody and Kelly reprised their song "From Little Things Big Things Grow" by incorporating samples from speeches by Prime Ministers Paul Keating in 1992 and Kevin Rudd in 2008. Released under the name The GetUp Mob, part of the GetUp! advocacy group, the song peaked at #4 on the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) singles charts. This version featured vocals by Carmody and Kelly, as well as other prominent Australian artists (including Urthboy, Missy Higgins, Mia Dyson, Radical Son, Jane Tyrrell, Dan Sultan, Joel Wenitong and Ozi Batla). Carmody has reduced his musical activities due to the effects of arthritis.

He lives with his partner Beryl on a 27-hectare (60-acres) bush block in south-east Queensland. On 22 October 2008, a live album from two Sydney performances by Carmody and various artists was released on DVD as *Cannot Buy My Soul: Kev Carmody*.

On 27 August 2009, Carmody was inducted into the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) Hall of Fame alongside The Dingoes, Little Pattie, Mental As Anything and John Paul Young, Carmody's first reaction was to laugh and reply "*I must be getting into the Hall of Fame with the lowest record sales in history*". At the ceremony, Missy Higgins inducted Carmody, who accepted the induction,

I accepted this for the Koori culture, the community and the family [...] It's a recognition of the input we've had on music. My songs came from what my grandmother, my mother, father, aunty and uncles told me. I'm just a conduit of stories.

—Kev Carmody, 27 August 2009

On the Wire

He came back from the city,
I say "cus' where ya bin?"
He says "Brother I been livin' on the wire.
Lived down in that gutter where the fittest survive
I ploughed through them fields of fire.
Had a needle in a vein, that profited the sane,
Had a friend with no name who was a liar,
Saw the white walls of freedom, never found the black door ,
Saw the Devil sing with the Angels in a choir....Sisters...."

CHORUS

*We'll take you home to the land we know,
Give you that peace of the evening,
Give you that moon with the wind on your face ,
The rains and the change of each season.*

"I saw people who were trapped
Under the whip of fat cats,
Saw people there devoid of their Dreaming.
Deep down inside there with so much to hide,
Brother you could see in their eyes there's no meaning.
So take me my sisters and welcome me home,
So I never again walk alone.
Our spirit demands that we die in this land
And I know now my spirit's come home."

I says, "Brother what you see in this land of 'Progress'?"
He says, "I never felt them four winds a blowin'.
Lived with people in chains, the wounded and lame,
Heard Messiahs who spoke without knowin',
And them seven seas rose and the desert lands froze,
Each individual there was trapped in a prison,
And my spirit cried out, to know what it's about, brother,
Their basis had no rhyme or no reason."

Cannot Buy My Soul

For 200 years us blacks are beaten down here too long on the dole,
My dignity I'm losing here and mentally I'm old.
There's a system here that nails us ain't we left out in the cold.
They took our life and liberty friend but they couldn't buy our soul .

Joe Hill died, Che Gevera fought and Pemulwuy lay down dead,
If a person speaks out critically here you can get loaded down with lead.
How long can the majority wait for their story to unfold?
They took their life and liberty friend but they could not buy their soul.

The cleverman spoke precisely, humanity he said was done,
It's creed of greed could not proceed if our struggle's to be won,
For humanity's more important here than that constant quest for gold,
You may take life and liberty friend but you cannot buy our soul.

Jesus woke one morning, rode a donkey up through the gate,
He could see quite clearly he was going to face his fate,
And the powers that be, could see that he, could not be bought or sold,
They took his life and liberty friend but they could not buy his soul.

I've Been Moved

I've been moved by the wind upon the waters
And the shadows as the leaves are blown,
When that old wind moans
On a weary winter Sunday
Like a friend that keeps on knocking on my home.

I've been moved by the crying of the newborn,
The honey sweetness of the air in spring.
I've watched the moonlight flood
Across them sleepy hills and valleys,
Heard the sadness in her requiem.

I've been moved watching nature slowly turning
Through the seasons and the patterns that she brings;
And as the morning star precedes
The breaking of a new day,
You'll find the black crow is already on the wing.

I've been moved watching something that's been suffering,
Be it humankind or any living thing,
From the fury of the storm
That old parched ground is reborn,
And the deserts blooms'd satisfy a king.

I've been moved by the tireless sea a churning
And them scarlets of an inland dusk.
When a close friend has died
I turned away and cried
As they laid 'em down and shovelled in the dust.

Thou Shalt Not Steal

In 1788 down Sydney Cove
The first boat-people land,
Said "sorry boys our gain's your loss
We gonna steal your land!
And if you break our new British laws
For sure you're gonna hang,
Or work your life like convicts
With chains on your neck and hands."

CHORUS

*They taught us
Oh Oh Black woman thou shalt not steal
Oh Oh Black man thou shalt not steal
We're gonna civilize
Your Black barbaric lives
And teach you how to kneel
But your history couldn't hide
The genocide
The hypocrisy to us was real
'cause your Jesus said
you're supposed to give the oppressed
a better deal
We say to you yes whiteman thou shalt not steal
Oh ya our land you'd better heal*

Your science and technology,
Hey you can make a nuclear bomb.
Development has increased the size to 3,000,000 megatons!
But if you think that's progress
I suggest your reasoning is unsound,
You shoulda found out long ago
You best keep it in the ground!

Job and me and Jesus sittin'
Underneath the Indooroopilly bridge,
Watchin' that blazin' sun go down
Behind the tall tree'd mountain ridge.
The land's our heritage and spirit,
Here the rightful culture's Black,
and we sittin' here just wonderin'
When we get the land back.

You talk of conservation
Keep the forest pristine green,
Yet in 200 years your materialism
Has stripped the forests clean.
A racist's a contradiction

That's understood by none,
Mostly their left hand hold a bible,
Their right hand holds a gun.

Elly

Elly wrapped her nineteen years
In a coat from '41,
Had the looks that'd make a grown man sigh.
From the Diamantina River country
She crossed the dry mid west,
From her childhood schemes and sheltered dreams
She broke the ties.

The commercial man made blunt demands
As they travelled south by east.
Elly turned into a woman overnight.
He set her down in the heart of town,
The millionaires' retreat.
She gazed up at the tall glass and concrete walls
At Main St. Surfers Paradise.

CHORUS

*If the decks been marked before the deal
You learn to compromise
Or you get to know the cool hand with the dice
You learn to live off losers, for they make the mistakes twice
You're living in high society but you're street wise
Just to survive, just to survive*

With those centrefold looks
And bay-blue eyes,
Man she stacked them in.
All the senators and doctors called her Madam,
With her fifteen girls she built a world,
A pleased paradise,
On what a man of God would call the wages of sin.

CHORUS

A wealthy woman
Drinks with diamond rings.
Twenty stories high,
Gazes out as the sun lifts from the sea.
To make it to the top
Elly sacrificed the lot,
And found that seven figure sum was far too high a fee.

CHORUS

From Little Things Big Things Grow

by Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly

Gather round people I'll tell you a story,
An eight year long story of power and pride,
'Bout British Lord Vestey and Vincent Lingiarri:
They were opposite men on opposite sides.

Vestey was fat with money and muscle,
Beef was his business, broad was his door.
Vincent was lean and spoke very little,
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor.

CHORUS

*From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow*

Gurindji were working for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land.
Daily the oppression got tighter and tighter,
Gurindji decided the must make a stand.

They picked up their swags and started off walking,
At Wattle Creek they sat themselves down.
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got
Tongues talking,
Back at the homestead and then in the town.

CHORUS

Vestey man said "I'll double your wages,
Seven quid a week you'll have in your hand!"
Vincent said "uhuh, we're not talking about wages,
We're sitting right here till we get our land!"
Vestey man roared Vestey man thundered,
"You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow."
Vince said "if we fall others are rising."

CHORUS

Then Vincent Lingiarri boarded an airplane,
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights.
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of people, from all walks of life.

And Vincent sat down with big politicians,

“This affair,” they told him, “it’s a matter of state.
Let us sort it out,... Why, your people are hungry!”
Vincent said, “No thanks, we know how to wait.”

CHORUS

Then Vincent Lingiarri returned in an airplane
Back to his country once more to sit down,
And he told his people, “let the stars keep on turning,
We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns.”

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting,
Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land,
And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony
And through Vincent’s fingers poured that handful of sand.

CHORUS

Now that was the story of Vincent Lingiarri
But this is a story of something much more,
How power and privilege, cannot move a people

When they know where they stand....
When they stand in their Lore....

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

River of Tears

There's a cold rain on the Autumn wind,
A brother murdered in Sydney Town,
Marrickville brother under supposed legal cover,
In his home they gunned him down.
We say oh oh oh oh oh ooooooh
Gunned him down,
Sad river of tears,
Two hundred years in the river of fear,
Gunned him down .

They took him out at point blank range
In his home with his small young son.
Shot him dead in his Marrickville bed
With a pump action 12 gauge shotgun.
Fatherless child and a grieving wife,
A black fugitive on the run,
On the run from two centuries
Of oppressions loaded gun.
We say oh oh oh oh oh ooooooh
Gunned him down,
Sad river of tears
Two hundred years in the river of fear,
Gunned him down.

Terrorists dressed in uniform
Under the protection of their law
Terrorise blacks in dawns of fear,
They come smashin' through your door.
You're not safe out there on Freedom Street,
You're not safe inside the "can",
For their shotguns and their stunt gas,
They're licenced to drop you where you stand.
We say oh oh oh oh ooooooh
Gunned him down.

Moonstruck

When the western sky's ablaze
And the sun lays down to rest,
When the curlew starts to cry
And the birds fly home to roost,
When the full moon begins to rise,
Satin moon beams on my face,
Beauty of the night goes far beyond,
Far beyond both time and place.

CHORUS

*No-one's lost who finds the moon
Or the sweetness of the wattle's bloom
Rebirth with the rain in spring
Or the dingo's howl on the autumn wind
Spirit of the moon here calls me home
Spirit of the moon here guides me home*

Moon it draws me to the scrub,
Night voices raised in song,
Past the water lilies bloom
In that tranquil billabong,
Walkin' on the shadowed leaves
That are reflected by the moon,
To the rocks and hills an' caves
Where the dingoes pups are born.

Stars ablazin' across the sky
In the brilliance of the Milky Way,
I'm surrounded by the beauty
Of every night and every day,
Walkin' towards that morning moon set
Caress of moonlight on my skin,
Knowin' that freedom of not carin'
Of why I'm goin' or where I've been.

Darkside

Chocolates, roses, kisses, zits to hide,
To copulate most males bribe.
Warm fuzzies. Gentle care.
Expensive cars, pubic hair,
Parties, alcohol, domestic fights and incest,
Adolescent, hot fast, messy sex.

CHORUS

*On the southside, darkside
South of the freeway them Logan kids
Use to hang out in that trashed out Rooster & Ribs*

Fast food, junk food, foul, food, chunder,
McDonalds, Kentucky, rail line thunder.

Tavern drive-in, ya buy the piss,
The grog we flog, they'll never miss.
Poor behind, square one, it's hard to start,
Five fingered discount from the rich K-Mart.

CHORUS

Fish smell, cabana, burnt out shell,
Rooster and Ribs is a scene from hell,
Broken plaster, fibro, power cords,
Hangin' down....to the burnt out boards....
Dope an' drugs keep ya stable....
Couples screwin' on the table.

CHORUS

Most night ya screw or fight,
Girlfriends, boyfriends, use the night,
Hid their reality from society,
Only place you can feel free.
Moans smashed, glass, trashed out spew,
Shit-hole smell, rat-shit view.

CHORUS

Graffiti, the neon cut the night,
Blue light flashin', hot spotlight,
Siren wailin' squealin' tyre,
Time to change into overdrive.
Batons, handcuffs, they carryin' guns,
Cops have arrived, it's time to run.

CHORUS

Blood Red Rose

Her night companion was James Joyces' prose.
She's like the morning dew left to melt on a blood red rose,
And her reading light it would burn 'til the night grew old,
She'd demand a man for a one night stand,
She always gave her soul,
And it took it's toll.

CHORUS

*Though his memory now is just a faded glow,
Time and again her pages show
That the stories there though the books been closed,
And as the summer comes, the summer goes,
Like a blood red rose.*

He's six foot brown eyed single young and tanned,
Pictured in her head is this animated man.
In reality her private thoughts git banned,
Deep in her contemplation and imagination
A solemn figure stands.
He's just her dreamtime man.

Her youthful grace has mellowed through the years,
Growing old is the most depressing thing she fears,
To wind up old and lonely with just a cat
In the city's heart she'd break apart,
She never could stand that.
Now she can't go back.

Though his memory now is a faded glow,
Time and again her pages show
That the stories there but the books been closed,
And as the summer comes, the summer goes,
Like a blood red rose.

Comrade Jesus Christ

He was born in Asia Minor,
A colonized Jewish man.
His father, the village carpenter,
Worked wood in his occupied land.
He was apprenticed to his father's trade,
His country paid it's dues
To the colonial Roman conquerors.
He was a working-class Jew.

Though conceived three months out of wedlock,
The stigma never stuck.
He began a three year public life
But he never made a buck,
Because he spoke out against injustice,
Saw that capitalism bled the poor,
He attacked self-righteous hypocrites,
And he condemned the lawyers' law.

But they've commercialised his birthday now,
The very people he defied,
And they've sanctified their system
And claim he's on their side!
But if he appeared tomorrow
He'd still pay the highest cost,
Being a 'radical agitator'
They'd still nail him to a cross.

You see
He'd stand with the down trodden masses,
Identify with the weak and oppressed,
He'd condemn the hypocrites in church pews
And the affluent, arrogant West.
He'd oppose Stalinist totalitarianism,
The exploitation of millions by one,
And 'peace' through mutual terror,
And diplomacy from the barrel of a gun.

He'd fight with Joe Hill and Waleca,
Mandala and Friere,
Try to free the third world's millions
From hunger and despair.
He'd stand with the peasants
At the pock-marked walls.
They'd haul him in on bail.
He'd condemn all forms of apartheid
And he'd rot in their stinking jails.

He'd denounce all dictatorships
And Mammon's greed,
And the exploitation of others for gain.
He'd oppose the nuclear madness
And the waging of wars in his name.
He'd mix with prostitutes and sinners,
Challenge all to cast the first stone.
A compassionate agitator,
One of the greatest the world has known,

He'd condemn all corrupt law and order,
Tear man made hierarchies down .
He'd see status and titles as dominance
And the politics of greed he'd hound.
He'd fight against
The leagues of the Ku Klux Klan,
And the radical, racist right.
One of the greatest humanitarian socialists
Was comrade
Jesus Christ.

Droving Woman

She buried him down on the edge of town
Where the brigalow suckers on the cemetery creep,
She stood with them children in a heavy brown gown
What you want you just can't always keep.

"I'm sorry", I says, "I knew him so well,
Though your body is young you just never can tell
When the hand of fate rings the final death knell."
She just turned with the saddest of smiles.

She says "At the start well we knewed it so hard,
We were always dealt the severest of cards.
Honeymoon spent droving Jamieson's stock
Through the wildest winter you seen.

"Romantic notions of horses and land,
They were soon dispelled as a fantasised dream.
Watching cattle at night in the mid-winter cold
Turns a person, both wiry and old.

"The flame of the breakfast fire'd be dead
As the sun rose up he'd be miles up ahead.
I'd be breaking the camp there and rolling the beds.
While he fanned the stock wider for feed.

"When the weather turned sour with the onset of rain
An' the truck'd bog down to the axle mains,
He'd move ahead with pack saddles and chains
And I'd wait in the mud by the road.

"With the blankets and canvas there hung out to dry,
With nothing for heat 'cause you couldn't light a fire,
With no stock permit for the forthcoming shire,
The dog'd whimper in the winter wind rain.

"Cattle don't camp where they're sloshing in rain.
They keep walking all night like a dog on a chain.
He'd be red eyed and weary with a pack horse gone lame,
I'd sit miles behind in the mud.

"It was down through Charleville up to Julia Creek
Living on syrup and damper and salted corn meat,
We had nothing but the 'roos and the mailman to meet.
We'd move up and down with the rains.

"But them inland skies have the starriest of nights
With the dance of the fire throwing flickering lights,

The beauty of its sunsets were a constant delight.
I felt that nature had let me intrude .

“The enormous vastness of them inland plains
Gives you a lonely contentment to which you can’t put a name.
Its satisfied glow city folks seldom attain,
They spend life on a right rigid rail.

“The kids got their schooling from the government mail,
We posted their work in at each cattle sale.
They considered the learning a self-imposed jail,
They’d rather help their father and fail.

“Early last month at the end of the dry
He was given a horse nobody could ride.
Alert were his ears with a fire in his stride,
He was young and his spirit was wild.

“To catch him each morning was an hour long battle.
We had to collar rope his near side to throw on the saddle.
He’d bite and he’d strike, he made my nerves rattle,
Pandemonium reigned with each ride.

“It was a hot summers’ mornin’ at the government bore,
There was stillness around that I’d never felt before.
How could he know it was fate at his door
That was stealthily watchin’ his moves?

“He mounted up quick, taking slack from the reins,
Grasped a full hand of hair from the horses long mane.
He’d just hit the saddle when the horse went insane
Churning dust in a frenzy of fear.

“The girth on the saddle let go at the ring,
The surcingle slipped it was impossible to cling.
The horse felt it go, made a desperate fling.
He was thrown to the length of the reins.

“I heard his spine snap like a ‘roo shooters’ shot,
He’d busted his back on the concreted trough.
Sickness and fear were the feelings I got
For the doctor was a six hour drive!

“I looked at his face and his colour turned white,
He turned slowly and said ‘I can’t make it till night.
My body is broken, I’m bleedin’ inside.’
And the life slowly drained from his eyes.

“I’ll sell up the plant and I’ll move here to town
Before the winter returns with a chill on the ground.
For what I’ve just lost can seldom be found,

I was blessed with the gentlest of men.

“Eventually the children will move to the east
But I couldn’t stand the bustle of even a quiet city street.
I’ll stay in the scrub here where my heart really beats
For some dogs grow too old for change.

Eulogy

Lay me down in the sacred ground,
Keep me from the cold.
Wrap me in the deep warm earth
Where the stars can see my soul.
Take me where the trees stand tall
By the waters in the river bend.
Let me face the risin' sun
Commend my spirit to the wind.

CHORUS

*Make no monuments or mortal crowns
Or speak my name again when you lay me down.*

Lay me where the forest blooms
In the land that's seen no plough,
Where the fragrance on the western wind
Is carried from every Springtime flower.
Give me peace and give me rest
Lay me down on the mountain crest.
Bury me softly without a sound,
Let the scrub grow back across that mound.

CHORUS

Bury me quick and bury me deep
Without no coffin or shrouded sheet.
Wrap me in the Mother Earth
So I can nurture the land's rebirth.
Give me joy and give me song,
Carry the struggle wide and long.
Do not grieve and do not weep,
Mortal memories are all we keep.

CHORUS

Let the winter dew fall on that grave,
Let me see the night sky blaze.
See the Moon in the winter wane,
Knifin' through that cosmic maze.
Give me water, give me fire,
Don't give me monuments of stone.
Give me rainbows in the sky,
Give back my land in which to lie.

CHORUS

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

b. 1947

Billy Marshall-Stoneking was born in Orlando, Florida, USA, in 1947. He grew up on military bases around the United States, and after his family settled in northern California, attended high schools in Sacramento County. He emigrated to Australia in 1972 after graduating from California State University (Sacramento) with a major in English and a postgraduate qualification in Education. From 1972 to 1976 he taught English in rural Victoria and in the Northern Territory, and from 1978 to 1983, lived in the Papunya Aboriginal settlement in the Northern Territory, where he established a program to help local Pintupi and Luritja people write and read in their own language. In 1980, he edited for publication the *Stories of Obed Raggett*, written in Pintupi/Luritja, the first bi-lingual text published by an Indigenous Australian writer.

While living in remote Northern Territory communities, Stoneking began publishing his own poetry—strongly influenced by the history and mythology of the Pintupi and Luritja people—in Australian literary journals such as *Overland* and *Westerly*, and his first collection of poems, *Ear Ink*, appeared in 1979. A major collection, *Singing the Snake: Poems from the Western Desert 1979–1988*, was published by Angus and Robertson in 1990. With Eric Beach and others, he was involved in the foundation of the Poets Union of Australia. He was also involved in the performance poetry scene, and featured in the performance poetry anthology *Off the Record*, edited by Pi O (1985). In 1982, Stoneking enrolled in the screenwriting program at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney. He has since built a successful career as a playwright and scriptwriter and editor, stage, film and radio producer, and teacher and mentor. He has also written novels, *Stringer* (1988) and *The Speed of Darkness* (1989), and an autobiography, *Taking America Out of the Boy* (1993).

Singing the Snake

A poem of Ayers Rock

Old Tjupurrula squeezes my arm
and puckers his lips, pointing—
Pintupi-style—toward the television set;
eyes fastened on the screen,
on dissolves of that sandstone monolith:
A montage of Uluru¹ awash with rain;
water cascading, crashing down—
blackening the Rock...

Leaning close, he whispers:
“The rainbow—
the rainbow comes from the earth
and returns to the earth.”

It is a snake, he says,
a giant snake
with a long beard and sharp teeth.
It lives in caves under the rockhole
at the top of Uluru.

“It has no need of men or women.
No Dreamings, no ceremonies,”
he says.
It was here before Creation Times,
and has never changed its form.
“Proper cheeky one, Snake,
very dangerous;
when it is angry, the land is dry.
People drink sand.”

No-one is happy for it;
no-one is sad for it.
It has no need of custodians.

(“Kurtangulu, nothing.”)
It is like that other one—
the serpent in the Garden.

It turns knowledge into fear,
and fear into knowledge.
But, with the right fear,
you can protect yourself.
Be mindful of the Snake.

Take time to look, look again—

feel the land through your feet;
the Snake will not harm those
who show the proper respect.
Those who rush in must be strangers.

“It will attack strangers.”

The bodies of the Ancestors—
the ones killed by the Snake—
cover the earth.
“Everywhere, everywhere!”

But who can find them?
Who can name them?

If you would know this country,
you must know its stories...

“In early days, yirriti²,”
Tjupurrula says,
“bush people carried the Song.
They carried it in drought times
through dry country,
travelling at night.
Once, when I was wiyai³,
a little boy, we came—
Mummy, Father, two sisters—
from our own country to the Rock,
to Uluru, following the track
of the Old Ones...
...silently, looking, looking,
coming to the Mother Place,
to the borning country of every ocean.

“People travelled here
when the land filled up
with children who had no memory of rain.
From Putardi, Triinya, and Karli Karru;
from Muruntji, Atila and Wimparraku,
they came...
All the families:
some from the north,
some from the south,
some east, some west...
Tribes didn't matter.
They said ‘hello’;
they talked quietly;
they shared meat, kuka⁴.
Together,
they looked at the rainless sky.

“Tjiila, dry; Ilpili, dry;
Pangkupirri, dry. Everywhere, dry!
Payback was forget about;
no argument, no eye.
Just men and women coming from forever.
Women must help, too!
Women and men, coming to Uluru...

“With one, special Song, they knew,
they had the power to sing the Snake.
They could make him remember them;
They could change his mind.”

The spell of the Tongue:
a hundred hundred round the Rock,

crying out for water,
deep-lunged,
cracking the voice,
mimicking thunder, chanting:
“Kapi! Kapi! Kapi!”⁵

Hands gesturing the air
night and day, circling,
until the voices became one voice
rising, falling...
a Song-chant for water,
becoming sure of itself.

“Wind might be hot.
Sky might be blue. Country all about —
dust...
Never mind.
We didn't look for cloud;
we didn't listen for thunder —
we had the power to sing the Snake;
to wake it, to move it,
curled in the earth;
to make it sorry ...”

And when the Snake stirred
(“if the singing was strong and true”),
it would push the water out
from its rockhole on top —
from that danger place, the place where
every river in the world begins
and ends.

“And like blood,
it would flow down, fall down,
alatji, everywhere, every side...

just like on TV:
Kapi! Kapi! Kapi!
for all the thirsty people ...
for all us perishin' mob."

Rain?

"No. Not rain," he says. "Water
from inside, where the Snake lives.
Inside the stone."

You saw all this, I asked;
water bubbling up, out of dry rock?

"Course," he says;
"in early days, olden times;
you know,
before the whitefellas came,
when bush people had the power
to sing the Snake.
Water everywhere —
all the way, everyway,
no worries,
from the Rock, and
fall down, fall down,
fall down ...

without clouds ... without rain!"

- 1... Uluru: traditional name for Ayers Rock
- 2... yirriti: long ago; olden times
- 3... wiya: no, negative
- 4... kuka: meat
- 5... kapi: water; rain

Sky

The guardians of the circumcision ceremony
live in the constellation of Scorpio, and
turn the sky over every night.

The sky is a shell.

The Milky Way, a creek
of gleaming stones.

The Southern Cross is
the footprint of the wedge-tailed eagle,
and mushrooms are fallen stars.

The sun is a woman,
moving by different paths
between winter and summer.

And Jupiter, the dog,
hunts with Saturn, who brings
bush tucker¹ back to Venus.

There are two moon men—
an old man and his son — who once
lived in the mountains;
the father is so large,
if you saw him, there would be
no room for anything but fear.

The son persuades his father
to stay in camp. Some nights he stays
with him there.

If the father were allowed to rise
his light would blind the world.

And once, after the whitefellas came,
the people from wilarata side
saw Jesus in the clouds.

1... tuck (or tucker): food, especially bush food

2... wilarata: west

The Mountains Haven't Moved

There are mountains behind my house,
big mountains; I see them from my kitchen window.
I have been watching them closely
for a long time. Today,
a letter arrived from Sydney:
a friend reminding me that soon
I will be coming back to the city.
She says I will love every minute of it;
she can hardly wait.
I wash the dishes and walk around the house.
The mountains outside my kitchen window
haven't moved.

My son has grown three inches this year
and my wife, at twenty-seven, complains of getting old.
I tell her she is ravishing and she laughs:
“don't be stupid.”
For four years I have watched
the hairs in my beard turning grey.

Outside my kitchen window
the mountains haven't moved.

Jenny tells me things have changed in Sydney.
There are soup kitchens again —
first time since the Great Depression.
Everything is dirtier, noisier, but
you can still get a free meal at Hare Krishna.
In the city, all my friends are splitting up.
I haven't seen a dentist for ages.
In the last two years I've put on a stone.
Today I'm reading a book; it tells me:
“Love endures.”
Outside my window, the mountains haven't moved.

I've got a skin cancer on the bridge of my nose.

The packing boxes are already stacked in the corner.
In three months I will be back in the city.
The windows, the buses,
the Proctor & Gamble plant,
the soapy fumes of Rozelle and Balmain,
the speaking “as a matter of course”,
the touching “as a matter of course”,
the rows of doors,
the Land Rights stickers in the windows
of the terraces and semi-detached.

For years I have travelled from one place
to another. In one year I lived
in four different houses.
I am beginning to wonder if, in my life,
I have collected more than I have thrown away...
I haven't lived in one place longer
than I have lived here.

Outside my window, the mountains haven't moved.

I write, I smoke, I read stories to my son.
I teach English to Aboriginal boys, and doubt
that even that will help them.
I know I have reached middle-age because
I think about death everyday.
Where does one go from the centre,
except a little closer to the edge?

The windows. The mountains.

Warumpi Band

Not too funny, just singing shy / playing shy,
guitar. They turn their face away; they don't stare.
Can't talk rough — Slow / Not Oh Oh Oh! and
eyes and tongue out everywhere, not hip wiggle /
Just hearing it...shaking inside.
If looking too much, if too much eye,
you miss it: words and strings.
Drummer might slide down — kurnta: shame.
Way of doing
not better
not different than us.
Same.
People like shy.

Tjukurrpa (Creation Times)

Before creation times, the world was flat,
featureless:
smooth as a turkey egg
floating in empty space, without weight,
without sound or colour, wind or light.
There were no stones,
no hills, no creekbeds.
Anarngu¹ wiya² —
No-one lived there;
no fire, no camps,
no sacred sites.
The world was naked. Silent.

Beneath the surface, empowered by some need,
Life twisted,
and stirred in its sleep:
a quickening deep inside the earth,
becoming stronger.
Nothing could hold it.
Pushing its way out,
breaking through,
it cracked the eggshell.
That which had been trapped was free.
Giants crawled from the dirt,
ranging the Land, aimlessly:
the beginning of Men and Women.

They dug for water;
they created fire out of nothing;
they hunted each other —
for food, for payback,
for love.
They created the Law and the seasons —
the idea of Family.
They transformed themselves into animals,
rocks and trees;
out of fear, out of desire, out of envy.
Some went to live in the night sky.

At the end of creation times,
(Just now!)
the creative spirits became one with the earth.
The record of their lives imprinted
on the land:
the claypan
made by the Snake giving birth;
the sand-dunes,

pushed up by the Dingo Men
dragging Kangaroo back to their cave.
No-one knows why
the creation times came to an end.
A long time ago,
perhaps,
there was someone who knew.
For a thousand generations,
the people have questioned one another,
quietly,
around campfires.

Birth to death, ignorance to knowledge,
summer to winter: patterns of a Dreamtime —
the only clues.

- 1... anarngu: Aboriginal people
- 2... wiya: no, negative

GARY CATALANO

1947 – 2002

Gary Catalano was born in Brisbane on 30 October 1947, of Italian and Anglo-Australian parentage. He attended Trinity Grammar School in Sydney, leaving school in 1963 and working in a variety of occupations before concentrating on writing full-time from the late 1970s. His first poetry collection, *Remembering the Rural Life*, was published in 1978; he would go on to publish nine further collections, including *The Empire of Grass*, joint winner of the Grace Leven Prize for 1992. He was particularly well known for his use of the prose poem form.

Catalano also worked as a literary and art critic, writing several books on Australian art and art criticism including *The Bandaged Image: A Study of Australian Artists' Books* (1983) and *The Solitary Watcher: Rick Amor and his Art* (2001), and he also published a collection of short stories, *The Woman Who Lives Here and Other Stories* (1983). He died after a long illness, on 8 December 2002.

A Poem is Not

A young but gloomy man
I'll never understand
that true poetic art
of writing from the heart.

A telegraphic line
is like a skinny vine
unweighed by any fruit.
I don't like poems which bruit

the heart's convulsions, or
put signs above the door
inviting all to peek
at what went on last week.

Poets must do more
than note their fondness for
the human species; if,
demurring, they insist

on passion or the like
and so uncaulk that dyke
no ogre's chilblained eye
shall water when they die.

The art, in poetry,
is not, like therapy,
an existential rub:
a poem is not a pub.

An Annotation to Marcus Aurelius

God help me if I become
a bore who recounts close shaves
with a notable event
or someone who bathes himself
in the acclaim of the mob:
I'd rather be a weird
creature alone in its hole
ignorant of this big world
and its manner of pleasing.
A hermit-like existence
is what I often yearn for,
a life with no distractions
to the serious business
at hand: healing an ill wind
and learning to be content
with the grass for a neighbour
and the ants and birds for friends.

Australia

I breathe the air of another country
when I walk among these people.
How terrible it is!

Generations have yearned for the new life
and it comes to this!
What will hold them upright

when their dreams are repossessed
and sold again at a discount?
But give me the smell of used nails

rusting in tins, and the dreams
that were swaddled in hessian.
I want the scene before it changed —

the blackberry-choked creeks,
the roads going nowhere, the shyness
of youth. Let me see again

the glitter of galvanised iron,
the scatter of farms and chicken-sheds,
and pictures like this:

in an afternoon of its own
a tortoise makes its slow way
across a road of blue metal and tar.

It pulls in its head at the sound
of an approaching car, whose driver stops,
gets out, then moves it into the tall grass

at the edge of the road,
where a creek has begun to unthread itself
from a soak, and etch its straggly line

across the adjoining paddock,
whose wall of trees closes off the scene
from all the other countries in the world.

Two Views of Richmond

Like tamed beasts
the cars are asleep
on their shadows

visitors
are few
and far between.

You could almost
be in the country,
so peaceful it seems:

Three peppercorns
in the lane, birds
and butterflies.

From Church Street hill
the eye takes in
the hard unhappy acres

of the city,
as regular
as graph paper

or a chessboard.
Sitting with a friend
in the sun

I talk away
the checkmate
of asphalt

and brick.

Two Meditations

1 Country

In any country but ours
we may not have noticed
that old wooden house

perched above the road
at the edge of the cutting;
as I picture it now

in the mind's eye
I see that it must form
a sort of museum

of lost causes. How
utterly vain
we must have been

when we thought that we
could possess this land
and call it home. A full

two hours' drive
from any place of size
or of consequence

that old house perched
at the edge of the cutting
tells all who wish to know

that this cannot be so. Yes,
as I picture it now
in my mind's eye

I see that this museum
could only be found
in a country like ours.

2 City

Although this city
that our fathers
have bequeathed us
is a poor place
in which to pray

I'd like to kneel
above bare trees

in total silence,
then think of what
it may be like

in six months' time:
the trees, by then,
should have new leaves,
and nothing of
this city will be seen

when I pause once more
at the window, kneel
completely in silence
—and then look down
into the street.

A Meditation on Air

It, too, is your enemy.
You take it in and out

yet it leaves no taste
to remember it by:

there is only
that constant need

for more. Like you
I would like to

puncture its quiet
perfection, yet cannot

catch it
in my hands. I wonder

what the first
beings thought

when the air
invaded their lungs.

Until then, they
were lifeless and dumb

but suddenly their
clay came alive

as air danced
lightly on their tongues.

Fresh Linen

The Chair

The life of this object is such an uneventful one. It comes into the world fully grown, much like Athena when she sprung from the cracked skull of her father, and immediately after that it settles down to an eternal torment of waiting. Imagine that you were bound and gagged from birth and you will understand something of a chair's sullen immobility. Should chairs gallop off and live in a world in their own, a republic of chairs, or should they try to escape their fate by coming into the world with legs of unequal length, quite spastic, quite useless? It is a pretty question, and one to which I have no answer. But it's not these gags which stop me. No, I am simply one of those who prefer the company of that more Olympian of objects, the bed.

A Wooden Afternoon

You sit at the desk with your pencil. The white page is unmarked. Your hand hovers over it, waiting to pin all life to one completed shape.

Outside a car races its shadow down the street. And then a lawn-mower begins to saw the afternoon into long, evenly-dressed slabs.

Apples and Oranges

Why is it that oranges seem pleased with themselves? In this, surely, they differ from apples, for apples are often pinched and drawn at their base, perpetually on edge, perpetually anxious. Translucent, like flesh, and invariably freckled, an apple can stand as a modest metaphor for man.

But oranges are different. Uniform in their colour and wholly round in their shape, oranges speak only of perfection. Perhaps it is for this reason that they rarely figure in the still life, that genre in which man most clearly reveals his active hand.

The Box

Here, put your hands inside it and run them over its smooth sides. Cardboard, it is true, but no exercise book is more handsome than this box. How can you think of throwing it to the flames? If you do, its little rectangular wings will lift in alarm, and the phoenix which rises from its ashes will scratch the evidence of your guilt on the blue page of the sky.

The Writer

The writer is seated at his desk. Throughout the long night he will employ the flimsiest of materials, simply in order to inveigle the whole panoply of nature into the retinue of his dreams. He hopes that his words will bestride the world like the fattest of clouds.

On returning in the morning, how does one judge the success of these labours? As to read what he has written may violate his hard-earned rest, I suggest you merely gaze at his slumped form. Your questions are: Is his brow dribbling with rain? Are his lips bloody with stars?

A Dream of Hell

Fire? Or endless mud? No, I see neither of these. I see a landscape of torn and broken books. Here you can crouch for a thousand years and piece together the

pages of the one book which bears your name, and thereby learn the meaning of your life, yet here it is too late to take advantage of that knowledge. Alive, why didn't you think of reaching out ... and of running your light hand across the braille of the stars?

At the Source

It is here that we find our clearest image of speech. They taste so clean, these syllables of the dark, and they make us realise that all our words should be pitched at a whisper. If you lend your ear to this wet mouth of the earth all you may hear is the faintest of trickles. A sound, it is true, though one softer than all known speech. Later these shy waters will knit themselves into creeks and rivers, then flow into those oceans which blanket the globe, but here we have the language of water in its pure and archaic state. Here it beds itself on the ear like a sheet of fresh, unscored linen...and here it offers an escape from the inchoate music of the world.

The Sleeper

A room at night, a room in which the curtains are stirring. Do they stir to the ebb and flow of the sleeper's breath, or are they moved of their own accord? Sleeper, sleeper, you cannot know that the moon washes your brow with its blond waves, you do not feel the reef on which you are caught. Around you there is only the ocean. Although its waves are ignorant of your life they will decide your destination.

Here

In a country far from here a young boy stands beneath a mulberry tree and looks up into its dark green crown. The tree is a land he would like to conquer.

Hand over hand he climbs into the tree, avenue on avenue he explores. The cool refrigerators are opened and their fruit dissolves on his tongue.

Only at the end of the day does he descend, and only then does he notice that his hands are stained. Like a letter written in indelible ink, these stains foretell his exile from that green country, a country far from here.

World

Once seen, there are some faces you will remember right to the end of your days. Moved by magnetic laws of its own, your memory will map those indented coastlines until no harbour or bay is left uncharted or unexplored. Like that face which confronts you in the silvery, liquid depths of the mirror, these faces each exist in an ocean of their own. They are vast geologic plates, and a mere handful of them is known to compose the world.

“Ma Jolie”

Perhaps it is for the best that her lover wholly failed to record her looks. Unlike Rembrandt's Hendrikje, we do not know how Eva appeared in the eye of the world. Apart from certain photographs, those most untrustworthy of documents, all we have are one or two descriptions of her. If I am not mistaken, I believe that Miss Stein has something to say about her appearance.

Yet no matter how eloquent these words may be, surely they cannot rival those which occur in the paintings themselves. Like this one, for example. It contains the plump bosom or well-rounded bottom of a guitar; and disposed casually about it are such things as a glass, the shuffling face of a dice, a pipe, and a playing card. And there, above them all, are these two words: *Ma Jolie*. Just like the sun in old maps

of the heavens, they sit at the top of this world.

One legend relates that the painter's closest friend, a diminutive and saintly poet, clowned insanely at Eva's funeral. Did he do so out of a temporary lack of feeling? No, I think not. I suspect he knew that the painter's happiness, though ruined, had also become eternal. Like, indeed, the sun. You have, as I have said, the plump bosom or well-rounded bottom of a guitar.

Train, Wimmera

(Sidney Nolan, 1943)

For reasons best known to itself, the eye begins its tour on the lower edge of the work, on which there are found two upended shirt-pockets and a cluster of three thick cigars. Believe it or not, a train has just passed between these two shirt-pockets. Already it is over the river, where we also see a few button-like trees and the brown patch of a paddock hung like an old tea-towel from the horizon. Due to the smoke belching from the engine, the artist will have to wash this paddock again and once more hang it out to dry.

But what is this? Only now do you notice that the last carriage on the skylarking train sports a harvest moon and the letter A. Like a man who prefers to believe that he is a boy in the moon, the painter is in the process of relearning the alphabet of the world. It is for this reason that we find him playing with chuff-chuff trains.

Three Objects

Is it not staggering to realise the number of times you have used this cup? According to your calculations, over the past five years you have lifted it to your lips in excess of two hundred thousand times. And still it endures. Have these lips of yours kissed a woman or child that number of times? Intimate as your breath, its bulging shape now rests in your hand, this cup with a broken handle and a chipped and slightly stained rim. In view of its years of faithful service, perhaps you should make it your successor and heir, and thereby leave to it the things which you value most — your wooden sword, your cardboard crown.

Illumination

It was late at night. I stood at the top of our back steps and gazed at the stars in the valley below, each one of which represented a greeting I have not returned and a hand I have not shaken. And there, in the left-hand sector of the horizon, a familiar poplar tree was lifting its darkened finger to the sky, and by that gesture calling my attention to the full moon, a moon which floated about in the sky like a slice of lemon in a cup of fresh tea.

Quotidian

Yes. That the day was an ordinary one can be proven by this one fact: there were no fat men in the trees. The birds rehearsed their coloured languages, the wind persisted in worming its way under stones, and the sun continued to pour its sticky liquids over the world, but the trees were quite bereft of fat men, those philosophic figures, somewhat sad of visage, who inquire into the meaning of things by sitting in trees and gazing down on the world. One consequence of this is that the day was remarkably free of those sharp cracks and anguished cries of pain, which, when taken together, tell us that another fat man has fallen foul of philosophy. In short, it was a day when our happiness was so complete that it bubbled into the air and there turned into those multi-coloured balloons — those balloons now bouncing about in the wind like, I would suggest, inflated philosophers, magically happy, and

magically fat.

The Walls of a Room

If only we could step through these lines of ordered black print and inhabit the clear room which lies behind them, then we could learn to express ourselves with a mathematical lucidity. For surely a room lies behind them. I see it now, and on its four walls I see these same lines of black print. Why, it is almost an ordinary room. When I drum my fingers on its mathematical skin, what do I hear but the sound a wall ordinarily makes, this hollow repeated “No” which answers my every question?

Galatea

It was then that the charcoal crumbled ... and you made that mark you had not intended, that smudge at the extreme lower edge of the figure. Given the fact that the same mark is wedged between it like a firm cushion or a miniature plinth, you wonder whether there is anything to be gained from this rebuke to your deliberate art.

If there is, it is likely to arrive in the following fashion. Imagine, for the moment, that your figure somehow learns to breathe the white air of its papery room. And imagine, further, that it feels so at home there its innate sense of well-being persuades it to venture out into the world. The curtains will then be drawn, and — as you blink and rub your eyes in reflected glare — that same figure will swim towards you, floating, one imagines, on sunlight or on air, and also forming the perfect mirror to your desire.

A Bowl of Fruit

If we were to search for an image of absolute serenity we could do worse than consider this bowl of fruit. Here are apples, oranges, bananas, and a single pineapple. Despite their differences of form and texture, these things have clearly learned to tolerate each other's presence. The means by which they have done so is simple: each has been content to be itself. Shouldn't the confident identity which they display be a lesson to us all? In rising to each new day, we could begin our thoughts by pondering on the massive tranquillity of these things, at peace with themselves, and thus at peace with the world.

Signs

As you stood at the rain-washed window you saw that the lights in the valley below were just like slivers of ice. They were working themselves into the dark body of the night. And then you heard the thin, needle-sharp bark of a dog as it threaded its way through the dark. It had come, you thought, from somewhere far in the distance. Unable to save the world, you quietly went on with your business, which was placing the cutlery back in its drawer and stacking away the clean plates. Yes. And on the latter you happened to notice that the knife-tracks resembled the fine-grain lines on your undamaged palm.

Don Quixote and Cervantes

In one of the early chapters of *Don Quixote* Cervantes tells us that his hero fashioned the visor of his helmet from a piece of cardboard. Don Quixote, we remember, is a man who believed in his perceptions, no matter how delusory they may have been. We know he was wrong to take a windmill as his great antagonist, but it is not for us to insist that this windmill was in fact an illusion. Surely

Cervantes also tells us that its stones and hard wooden boards blunted the point of Don Quixote's metal lance.

How different it is today. We enter a cinema to see a film about the Man from La Mancha, and as soon as a switch is flicked we find ourselves transported to that arid landscape of central Spain. It seems entirely deserted. Yet in it we will see, by and by, Don Quixote impale a windmill on his ingenious lance; and if our perceptions are sharp enough we may also notice that on this occasion the windmill is fashioned from nothing but cardboard. It is in this way that a hard and practical world turns an author's words to its own account.

Surely this is a quirk of fate which Miguel de Cervantes was unable to foresee. We reach for his book again, and as we hold it in our hands we come to the surprised realisation that Cervantes himself, the historical man who lived from 1547 to 1616 and wrote a book called Don Quixote, survives, like his hero, only in cardboard. Don't you see? The sheets which bind this book are no larger than the one used by Don Quixote in his visor.

A Ritual

The incinerator stands in the corner of our backyard. About three feet in height, it is made from large grey concrete blocks and shelters beneath a tree whose name I do not know. Every ten days or so I gather the rubbish basket from my study and empty its contents down the square mouth of the incinerator. Then I strike a match and watch my old or abandoned thoughts perish once more. The smoke curls up and disappears into the body of the tree, and I come to understand the sacrifice I have just made, a sacrifice to a god whose name I do not know.

The Scholar

You look down at your arm as it rests on the table and there notice that a flake of ash is caught in the hairs on your wrist. Bluish-grey in colour, the flake is no more than two millimetres square. For how long were you staring at the page that was open before you? Ten minutes? Fifteen? Even twenty? Do you know that in this period of time the words at which you were gazing were less words than flames? The breath of eternity was on them, and they were burning the page to ash. In truth, the only thing that now remains is this tiny flake, suspended over your skin by that scribble of hairs on your wrist.

Two Points

I don't know how long it is since last we went together to the creek. After leaving the park we'd walk past the line of cypress trees, then cross the road to the high left-hand bank. Today we found, to our surprise, that the trees had gone: all that remained of them was a pile of logs sitting in the middle of the field, and the place itself was almost unrecognisable. Do I need to remind you of the coolness of the air beneath the cypresses, of the shadows they cast across the path? The path itself had contracted, and what had previously been a mystery now revealed itself to be nothing more than the measurable distance between two points. The sight rekindled in me the memory of those trees and our frequent walks beneath their deep-green leaves, those walks on which we were often inducted into a heightened state. As Stendhal once observed, the state in question is one which demands a mathematical precision in its expression. For this reason I must remind you of those two points. The first marked the beginning of the path. The second, quite simply, signalled its end.

Identities

Why has it occurred to me that his bird could be a messenger, the one who sits on the fence outside my window? Each afternoon it sits there. Just now it has jerked its head to one side and looked back at me, as if I had some answer to give it. But what words can I say to this creature, whose patience rivals the slow patience of a stone? For years it has come, been noticed, then gone away ... and for years it has returned. When I hear the sound of a stone striking wood I look up — and what do I find but a bird? A thread is woven through our lives by such recurrences. We eat and drink from the same plate or cup, fall asleep and wake in the same bed, dress before the same mirror, and learn to read the face and gestures of someone else. And to this order the bird belongs. But it is not simply a bird which sits on the fence and looks at me. No. My life is forever beckoning me to follow it through the window and into the air — where, given the patience of a stone, I shall learn to fly, and to carry, occasionally, the simplest of messages: that stones, mirrors and birds are known to have something in common.

The Strange Man

Because he had always been something of a hermit the surprises in his life were few: sometimes the weather changed suddenly and led him to dwell on the precariousness of things, and at other times a strange word wedged itself into his consciousness. We are able to make these statements on the basis of the diary he left. On opening its pages we discover that the entries generally fall into two main groups. One group is formed by those odd words underlined with red ink — words like “lurruper” or “clanting”, neither of which is found in the dictionaries; and the second group by those characteristically minimal remarks he made on the weather. Allow me to quote: “Heavy rain today.” “The afternoon was large.” “The weather was mostly.” The esteem in which he is now held is due, one imagines, to the peculiar sufficiency of these entries, for don't they tell of a man who achieved a kind of stone-like autonomy? This is indeed the clue to his strange life. Sometimes the sun baked his hard grey skin with such thoroughness that he basted on his own sweat. At other times the rain would so wash his hard body that entirely unsuspected colours were brought to its surface. And thus we have a life that we are able to contemplate. For its perfection. For its finality. And, as I have said, for its quite ordinary strangeness.

Atlantis

A shore to which many dreamers had sailed, a severe, classic light. Was Atlantis torn from sunlight and air by an earthquake, or was it the target of a meteor? You may ponder its fate, yet anchor your belief in neither thesis. If the truth be known, it sank under the weight of its own perfection. The arched lid closes; the mollusc deserts its perfect shell.

A Geography

It is true that the mind has no clear edge. Living in liberal times, we know that a well-composed view must imply the wilderness, and so allow blackberries to overrun a favoured path. Though syllables cascade from the tongue and only rarely make sense, the ear is rightly charmed by the music it hears. Let loose from a formal garden, the self's like a carnivore escaped from the zoo: if all goes well it will reach the hills, and there live the life for which its nature has designed it. To decry the beast for its raids on outlying farms and to place a bounty on its head is to lose sight of what it leaves behind: polished bones may be one thing, but what of

those fabulous tracks at the edge of a musical pool? Unsighted, never caught, now it is free to live in two worlds at once. One may be the world of legend; the other, roughly congruent, is the necessary world of fear.

The Delta

After thousands of miles of chiselling a single course it here relaxes and unravels; its threads spread everywhere in a web of disconnections. Has the river reached its old age, or is it that now it resigns itself to the unruliness of water? The delta marks that moment when the imperial river gives way to the liberal sea.

The Vortex

No, it is not true. When they arrived at that land they did not find it with all the instruments of civilisation intact. After disembarking on its sparkling beaches and wondering at the absence of inhabitants they slowly established a precarious foothold on its rim. Years and even decades were to pass before they forced a track inland, at times spurred on by the rumours of what was awaiting them at the centre. Both disappointed and amazed, they found nothing. Only — and this is the salient fact — the more patient occasionally uncovered an object which gave them food for thought: a lump of metal the size and shape of a plumb-bob, a petrified spirit level, its bubble intact, a metal ruler encrusted with shells. Someone, it is true, had been there before them, yet the land was still theirs for the taking.

Generations and centuries passed, and finally the land was webbed with an intricate network of roads, many of which converged on the cool, crystalline structures they built at the land's centre. We infer all this from the foundations recently discovered there, and presume that the buildings in fact formed the capital.

Yet once more the mystery deepens, for this race also disappeared from the face of the land, driven into the dark by a force we can scarcely comprehend. Neither war nor plague drove them away; one moment they were, the next they had ceased to exist.

True, some claim that our ignorance in such matters is the natural effect of time, but there are others who believe that the land is ruled by a vortex. They point, not without justice, to yet another race — a race, perhaps, much like our own — who, on arriving at a new land, gradually come to discern the outline of a previous one, a shadow beneath that of their own. They, too, pushed on to the heart; they, too, were drawn into the vortex.

Light and Water

It did not appear to be light. We had traced the winding creek down from its source and had just stepped through a portal of tall, lichen-covered trees and granite boulders. It was then that we perceived its slow, feathery fall to the cool nave of this cathedral, whose space it proceeded to chisel. Coldly. Deliberately. Like water.

Notes

The hills are the colour of dry hay, the creeks have neglected to flow, and in each paddock you see shoal on shoal of shipwrecked trees. When driving north at the end of summer I tune my ear to the spare and monotonous music of this landscape. The notes, spaced far apart, are like that light clinking sound as dry bone strikes dry bone, and the bones themselves are white, weathered, and almost weightless. But look! The horizon has floated off on its cushioning and mirage-like lake! Now it forms another continent, the purity of whose one note is enhanced by the fact that no bridge connects it either to the note which preceded it or to the note

which will follow. Why, if you listen now you may even hear the impossible music of horizons. It charms the water back into its bed and draws on the trees to their shipwreck.

Plums

I remember, for that was the day when the air smelled heavily of plums. We had just come down from the mountains and were making our way to the river when suddenly we became aware of the smell. After a brief moment of hesitation in which we paused and looked about us, we agreed among ourselves that the smell was indeed that of plums. Yet from where did it come? Search as we did, no trees appeared between us and the horizon.

It was only when we reached the river that we became aware of the nature of the country through which we were passing. Its waters, you see, were purple. Plum coloured, in fact. We were so struck by their unexpected aspect that we neglected to taste them, and instead turned and gazed at the two hills between which the river was flowing. The hills, to our surprise, were white — intensely white. Only one colour could be discerned in their expanse of whiteness, and that was the purple of the vein-like river. On raising our telescopes we found that the white belonged to the blossom of plum-trees, which were packed together like ice-crystals in the dense, hard body of a glacier.

But this was a sight which lasted for only a moment. Like a wall of snow melting in the sun, that white country dissolved before our eyes. I tell you, the river was white when we finally crossed it.

Since our return a passionate conviction has rooted itself in the minds of all the members of our party. That white country, we are impelled to believe, was in fact the lost garden. For reasons we dare not attempt to fathom, our tired band had been privileged to glimpse it. And then we were warned away, for admonitory cries accompanied us as we continued on our journey. Even now I can hear them. They are like a white sound in the head or the clear and empty background to all one's thoughts.

Only one member of the party has suffered incurable damage. I refer, of course, to Porter, who fell heavily when we were within sight of our destination. The poor man only regained consciousness when we brought him to the hospital. The journey seems to have turned his mind, for every time he wakes in his white and glacial world he asks — would you believe it? — for plums.

Wood

This piece of driftwood, which I found on the beach at the height of summer, has been sitting on the bookshelf next to my desk for more than three months. Every now and again my eye happens to fall on it, and immediately it does so I am forced to ask: how did this chicken's claw find its way into my study? For a chicken's claw is what it appears to be. See, here is its gnarled and calloused heel, and here the yellow and horny nails which have bunched themselves into a pathetic gesture of submission. If you lift up this claw you'll hear a dry rustling sound as a few grains of shell-grit fall onto the papers before you. There, did you hear? It told you that once more this creature has departed from its life. And it told you that once more it has stiffened into wood.

Books

Books must prefer their own company to that of human beings, who rarely use them in the proper or appropriate way. As they stand quietly on the shelf with only

their narrow spines turned to the world, they know they will not have to suffer the indignity of supporting a cup of coffee and getting branded for their efforts — or cushioning, say, a yellowing apple-core for days on end. And even when they are taken down from the shelf and read for the wisdom they may, just happen, to contain, they invariably suffer further indignities: a pencil will be placed between their pages and thereby weaken their spine, the final effect of which is that on a secretly determined day all twelve hundred pages of War and Peace or Les Misérables will suicidally rebel against this misuse and flutter to the floor, their sequence lost forever, at least in this incarnation.

Soldiers

No, where these soldiers are concerned my sympathies do not go out to those who fight at the front, for they have the longest of lives. And the terrain over which they march is generally a level one. But think of those condemned to bring up the rear. Think of them clambering over those barricades of broken bricks and pieces of cement, of tin cans and discarded dolls, of smashed bottles and old shoes. Or think of them marching through that thick and tangled undergrowth, each strand of which will coil about their limbs and infect them with a terrible footrot. Although you admire the stoicism with which they approach their duties, you are forced, finally, to take pity on them, and so attempt to wrench them out of the line. It is at this point that they will surprise you even more, for no matter how decrepit they may be they have no wish to leave the ranks, and so cling desperately to the soldiers on either side. It is in this way that they express their esprit de corps. But one further surprise awaits you: when you have finally managed to pull them free and have tossed them into the grass at your feet, what do these palings do but lie as if they are still at attention, their grey bodies stiff and perfectly straight?

The Spoon

As I glance down at the sink I notice the spoon standing in the cup, and suddenly I am back in the park on that late autumn day. You remember, don't you, the time when we trudged up from the lake towards the gate? We had passed a small pavilion and had paused at the top of the hill to look over the city when we noticed a pair of wrens flicking about on the grass just ten feet from where we were standing. Their tails were sticking up in the air like the unweighted end of a see-saw, or, indeed, like this spoon now resting in the cup. And this, in turn, leads me to the time when you glanced out of the side window and saw a sparrow baulk suddenly and veer away from the glass, a look of amazement in its eyes. I know, sometimes birds do knock themselves out on windows, but the fact remains that the cup in which this bird has brained itself — not fatally, I hope — is quite opaque; and it holds, I believe, nothing but coffee. Do birds like coffee? Before you answer this question with findings drawn from the latest scientific research, allow me to say that I haven't forgotten that the bird, far from being a wren, is really a metal spoon. But it looks like a bird. And that, I believe, is the point of this sudden veer in my flight towards the transparent realities of the world, of which this kitchen sink is surely a supreme example. Oh yes, before you go please tell me whether or not there's a look of sparrow-like fright on my face.

Church and Two Horses

Once again our eyes are tugged back to that tattered shoe-box sitting precariously at the top of a hill. We have broken our journey and are standing in the carpark of a motel. Around us there is a landscape of hills. Two horses are grazing

near a group of cypress trees which grow halfway up one of the slopes. Although it is winter, the grass is the colour of harvested wheat. The cypresses are almost black in the soft and muffled light. The shoe-box, whose actual form is that of an old wooden church, looks as if it has been blown from hill to hill. No trees surround it. Only a fence, equally dilapidated, the winds and air of another century ... and those two horses, their tails twitching occasionally, their heads bent low to the grass. But when they run their hooves are the sound of a church tumbling.

Visitors

They had come without warning. I looked up from my desk and there they were, huddled together like a crowd of commuters waiting at the tram stop on a winter's afternoon or, I imagine, like a group of refugees pausing at the edge of the abyss. I wondered what they could be thinking of as they held those grey umbrellas aloft and simultaneously attempted to maintain their footing. Those at the back of the crowd, who were smaller and presumably younger, were obviously filled with a great curiosity about the prospect before them, for as each minute passed they pushed with all their might against the legs of those at the front. Only now does it occur to me that such desperation about the future shows that they knew it was out of their hands.

And, in truth, it was. When I looked for them on the following day I saw that they had gone. Yet here and there a tattered umbrella, now stained black from the rain, lay at the front of the long cave-like opening in which they had huddled together. It is hard to believe, yet this was all that remained of them. In an hour's time these same scraps would be indistinguishable from the rotting splinters of wood which formed that long spear-like hole at the top of the fence — the said hole being, of course, the place in which these fugitive visitors had lived and died. But I've forgotten to say that the beings in questions were simply toad-stools.

“Alone in the house ...”

Alone in the house, I sit at the open window in the side room and there listen to the random voices of the night: the car which changes down as it negotiates the corner in front of the house, the fitful dripping of a leaking tap in the adjoining room, or the isolated screech of a bird in that nearby tree. And beyond these sounds I can hear the slow and patient breathing of the earth as it nestles down among its rocks and stones and prepares itself for the enormous labours of the following day, when it will swing again through thousands of miles of empty space before it returns to the place in which I see it now, its mouth hidden from view by the neighbouring house ... and hidden, of course, by the darkness itself, a darkness which smells of rained-on leaves, a darkness which smells of earth. Alone in the house, I sit by the window and take the earth into my mouth.

The Bone

I have brought you a bone. Like the most precious of objects, it must be kept in a dark and secret place, a place from which it should only be removed when you wish to escape from the world and contemplate a thing which has passed beyond use. Only then may you run your fingers along its polished barrel and gaze at that spot in which its blood-red bullets once lodged. Who would have thought that murder or suicide lurked in this bone, this bone which has borne without complaint the burden of its fate and thereby entered the white and glittering world of pure form? Here, I have brought you a bone.

Incident from a War

When the enemy planes flew over our city they disgorged not bombs but loaves of bread. Can you imagine our surprise? We ventured outside after those planes had disappeared from the sky, and what did we find there but heaps of broken bread at which the pigeons were already feeding?

Bottle-Green

I remember that castle, the one made of old wooden boxes which stood at the top of the hill. Each morning, on opening the screen door and stepping down to the concrete patio at the back of the house, I used to lift my eyes to the castle and notice how its rough square was outlined against the blue sky.

The castle was strange, stranger than words. And someone lurked in its labyrinthine passages and rattled broken pieces of glass whenever I happened to draw near. Was it the home of a mad king, a king whose rough red face was covered with grain-like fragments of glass and tiny brown splinters of wood? If so, to rattle those pieces of broken glass was his only weapon.

There were some mornings when I was almost convinced that I would see the end of his kingdom. As I stood on the grey concrete and stared up at the castle, an army of soldiers would begin to assault its walls. The siege would last for a period of ten or fifteen minutes, at the end of which the strange glass heart of the castle would be exposed to the eyes of the world.

But these soldiers never arrived. As day followed day and year followed year, the glass of my youth slowly darkened to bottle-green. And over this process the castle stood witness, its square shape sinking into my mind like the boots of a soldier walking through mud or the dregs in a bottle of wine.

Histories

The histories I wish to learn are the histories of simple things: postcards, envelopes, the mattress, the shoe. Who constructed the first paling fence? Who invented the toothbrush? Where do I find that book which contains the histories of these and other objects? Surely it must exist, even if only in the form of a tattered cardboard box. I have often dreamt of discovering this box as I poke about in the corner of an old shed. Yet on lifting it down from the high shelf on which it has perched for twenty or so years I am repeatedly surprised to discover that it contains nothing but envelopes. And on each of these envelopes the name of a single object has been inscribed: "The Matchbox" is here, as are "The Scissors" and "The Umbrella". If dreams are a form of desire, mine are fated to be unfulfilled, for in my dreams these envelopes are always sealed in such a way that they can be opened only when the objects to which they refer have become as antiquated as, say, a round-bottomed bottle or an oil-lamp. The symmetry of the world is such that only then will one be able to learn the secret histories of things.

A Fuchsia

How can I convey its eagerness for life? In the space of a few days its small green bud has fattened into this pink airship, and now it is tugging and straining at its mooring rope. And this is but the first of its transformations. For when we return on the following day we see not an airship but a split skirt and the hem of a petticoat. On another, and there's a Dutch winged cap like the one you often discern in old paintings of the Dutch School.

But its final transformation is the one I like the most, for now it can be seen that it really has been intended for flight. Look! Now that its petals have all curved

upwards, what does it most closely resemble but a ballet dancer poised high on the tips of her toes? And already her slender arms are lifted in triumph, as if she were ready to parachute into another dimension.

Another Country

I have often wondered how the inhabitants of that land manage to endure their vicious climate. There hail falls in long dagger-like icicles which often impale the unwary, there the razor-sharp winds scrape the skin from the face, and there the sun compensates the inhabitants for its long absences by hammering at their anvil-heads with a malign and headache-inducing intensity.

When it comes to the inhabitants themselves the gods have been yet more unkind. Beauty of form is unknown among these stooped and simian-browed creatures, whose hairy legs end in thick stumps, whose knees are calloused, and whose arms hang limply beside them as they parade to and fro and savour the undeniable beauties of their climate.

Of recreations they know only one. Consider our artist's impressions of these people, and notice how their dangling palms are always curved, as if they secretly cupped a stone intended for the anvil heads of their fellow citizens. One almost wishes that this was indeed the case. I put it to you: would not the cause of humanity be advanced if these supremely unattractive people somehow managed to kill each other off?

In their wisdom, the inhabitants themselves have found a better purpose for their hands. Almost without bending over, they scoop them into the mud at their feet and bombard each other. It is, you will agree, a curious custom. Yet what is even more curious is that the most highly regarded among them are not those who manage to throw the most mud but those most adept at receiving the same substance, which sticks to one like a suppurating sore and smells disgustingly.

In short, the customs of these people are a standing rebuke to our somewhat naive notions of what is natural in human affairs. It is for this reason that, in charting their country, we have placed it right at the bottom of the map.

True Religion

A boy is slowly making his way into the far corner of a shed. Engulfed by the warm and chaff-smelling dark, he reaches for the heavy flap of the big hessian bag which stands in the corner, then bends down and sinks the tin he is clutching in the bag's unseen belly. As the grain rushes into the tin and fills it nearly to the brim, he hears a sound like that made by an army of roller-skaters. Yes, the roller-skaters are passing him by at a distance of fifty or so yards.

When he reappears in the open door of the shed and once more stands in the sunlit world, he is surprised to discover that the only things to be seen are the chickens in the nearby run. The road along which those skaters should be moving is empty of people or traffic. He weighs the tin in his hand, then steps over to the run. An ambassador of darkness who dreams constantly of roller-skates, he has come to these heathen creatures charged with a single commission — and that is to spread the true religion of the big hessian bag.

Departures

The hand that waved at me from behind the frosty glass of the window was not really a hand. Do you know that when I gestured towards it I saw my own hand detach itself from the wrist and swim off through the soft grey air of this winter afternoon? Its tail waved as it nudged at the glass, where it sought a point of entry

into that bottomless pool. What happened then is difficult to understand, for in that moment of time I found myself suddenly transported to the most melancholy of countries, a country in which one is condemned to stand as stiffly as a statue, and in that manner wait (for how long one does not know) for one's broken limbs and hands to reappear. You ask whether the country in question is the sunken one of exile. Perhaps. But it is also the country of common experience.

The Building

Because of its gloomy appearance the building is like a defeated army, and the gloom is so heavy it makes handling difficult and postage quite out of the question. Still, if you wish to transfer its impression to someone don't despair at the apparent impossibility of it; there are some things you can do, and it's always better to feel like a winner than be dragged down by your enemies. I say this to you because these enemies of yours are hiding behind the stinking and spider-infested bushes which grow at the building's corners. See, there is one over there. There's a pen-knife clutched in his hand and a concentrated look of intense hatred standing, apparently at attention, in each of his eyes. And this is the building you have been waiting to enter! Move closer and you will see a single word rudely carved above its padlocked door: fame.

Sentence

To compose a sentence which has never been written before is much like crossing a mountain stream by leaping from stone to stone: as the torrent foams beneath you and beckons you down into its engulfing void, you need to possess not only a pair of nimble feet (clad, if possible, in rubber-soled shoes) but also a firm belief in the wisdom of stones.

Electricity

When the electric dawn beings to assemble its buttery blocks I am transported to the place of assignations. I question a woman and plunge my hand into the dense thicket of her body, searching for those hidden fruits whose fragrance fills the air. It is at this moment that a spectral crowd begins to pass. Its assembled heads are nodding from side to side in answer to a metronome. I ask you: to where can we flee if all the piers are under repair, if their faded grey timbers promise no embarkation? I have looked to the sky but all I see there is a tattered flag. If the sun was to shed its dragon-teeth and the increasingly pear-shaped trees were to signal their philosophic inclinations by a show of absolute stillness, what would we have in our hands but those small grey lizards who are known for their gentleness? It is for these reasons, and these alone, that I refrain from drumming on metal.

Equation

It is only when we are completely convinced of the obstinate otherness of things that the cucumbers will emerge from their hiding places and show us their unbandaged wounds. Equally, it is only when we agree to loosen our grip on those steel bars in our heads that the lighthouse will reveal itself to be a pillar of pure lightning.

Change

Now that the days are getting longer we can begin to spend more time outdoors. Already the branches of the wattle are weighed down by its golden fleece, and already the almond tree has begun to flower. When I woke this morning I thought

that it was spring: the sky was a polished blue, and no wind troubled the trees. Believing, once more, in the beauty of life, I wanted to dedicate the rest of my days to some great task, yet all I could think of was to paper the world with a perfect facsimile of this surprisingly spring-like midwinter's day. And what did I do when I finally got out of bed? Well, I opened the window wider ...and felt the onset of rain.

The Sculpture

Though its title says "Mother and Child" it could just as well be "Smooth, water-worn landscape" or "Object found on the shore". For what do we detect in these analogies between flesh and stone but a dream of perfect union with the world? The child, who has closed its mouth on a stubborn teat of the earth, is seeking again that cave which provided him with his first home. Fluid and immobile by turns, this object stands as witness to our most enduring of dreams, and in its presence one can almost hear the water's slow chisel as it wears a hole in the stone.

View from a Window

Knowing, as you do, the geography of this place, you do not need to be told that rain will soon be falling when you notice that the houses and trees on the other side of the valley have blurred into one general mass. As you sit at the window and await the onset of rain, let your eye roam over this mass and appreciate its faint variations in tone. If the deepest of these coincides with the cypress tree smack in the middle of the scene, the lightest is somewhat to its right, where the sandy wall of a house is just visible between a group of smaller trees. From the way in which this patch is inching this way and that and constantly changing in size, you know that a wind is shaking those trees and blowing them back and forth. In five minutes time the same rain-laden wind will arrive here and spatter your window, and with it the whole view will blend into one general tone.

Threads

I imagine the sea is quite distraught at its repeated losses, for now it is flapping its ragged hem as its waves make for the shore. And *there*, right on the horizon, a line of dolphins. As they leap in and out of the water, what is it they are trying to do but stitch the sea and sky to each other?

About clouds

I tell you, those clouds looked just like lumps of dough which happened to be sagging into themselves on some sort of vast perspex table. There we were, driving beneath them for hundreds and hundreds of miles, and as we did so they steadily became more grey. Against all that the meteorologists may say, I am forced to the conclusion that the table on which they were resting was covered with a dense layer of grit, for only the presence of such a substance can explain the fact that at the end of our journey—a journey, you could say, beneath clouds—their flat pancake undersides were almost as grey as one of Chardin's tea-towels.

The Lily

The lily grows just three feet from my window. How many times have I entered my study and seen it there on its slanting stem, this heart of a martyr jammed on the end of a stick and then held up to the innocent clouds? Swaying, at times, and at other times still. Yes, the lily grows just three feet from my window.

Babylon

The makers of the Ishtar Gate could not have been more proud of their achievement. For weeks on end I worked on the stacks, watching them rise until they almost reached the top of the fence. Everything was grist for my mill: the cast-offs the builders left, the branches I pruned from the almond tree, even the old, half-rotten weatherboards from the demolished laundry were sawn up and added to the pile. As surely as two plus two makes four, the stacks rose.

Now, just as surely, the same law will operate in reverse. At some point near the end of winter the stacks will vanish from the face of the earth, and not even a clay tablet will record the fact of their existence. Such, perhaps, is the fate of most Babylons, and especially those made, as mine had been, of bits of ordinary wood.

The Ladder

Unlike those which occur in most fables, this ladder is not made of either living or dead wood. It is therefore of no practical use if you wish to climb into the clouds. Yet just as surely as a leaning ladder invariably forms the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle, so this shiny aluminium staircase can be used for other things. Why, only yesterday I climbed onto the roof and replaced that broken tile through which the rain had been trickling for the last couple of years. In a similar spirit of enthusiasm for a long delayed task, tomorrow I intend to climb into my head and clean out the rubbish which has accumulated there: all the stories I wish to forget will be ejected through my ears, and all those words whose taste I no longer care for will be placed on the tip of my tongue and spat into another language. And all this with the aid of a shiny aluminium ladder, this narrow-gauge railway which runs straight up to the stars.

A river and some hills

We are driving south. The road winds down through the trimly muscled flanks of the hills, then skirts the western edge of the river flat. Were we to stop the car and step into the roadside grass our ears would soon detect a dry papery sound, for that large paddock on our left is crowded with dead thistles. The river flows at the far end of the paddock, where it is half-hidden behind a bank of tall casuarinas. Every now and again we catch a glimpse of its cool waters, the glint of tin-foil in the sun. If water and earth are indeed part of each other, this river is flashing a signal to these hills and schooling them in the movement of water, for their flanks are so criss-crossed by sheep-tracks that they have broken into waves. Driving here with a river on one side and water hills on the other, we can almost imagine what the Israelites must have felt at the parting of the Red Sea.

Jigsaw

The Statue

No one could have foretold how rapidly it would fall from favour. If, in one year, newly-weds proudly posed before it and asked its blessing on their union, in the next schoolboys slouched at its base or pelted it with apple-cores. It is inconceivable that it knew of the change in its fortunes. Yet how do we explain the phenomenon that some passers-by have observed: how, on certain nights, it folded its hitherto outstretched arms and seemed to wrap itself against the cold?

Tap

You know that you are exposed to view as you walk over to the water-tank and grip its tap. Nothing happens at first, but when you start to exert more pressure you hear metal swear and see a trickle of brownish water descend to the ground, where the soil is mingled with pieces of reddish gravel. What happens next is devoid of colour and could occur in negative, for as you bend down you hear a shout and, on turning, see the scarecrow-man running towards you through the long white grass of the paddock. The scarecrow-man is indeed frightening. Yet for some reason the thing you will most clearly remember is the gritty feel of the water as it washed over your stiffened hands.

Bicyclist

The young bicyclist can still smell the dump as he pedals round the corner and glances up at the general store: two boys are playing with yo-yos on its wooden verandah. The scene is unremarkable and he will think little of it, but more than twenty years later it will suddenly occur to him that the large block letters on the newspaper poster just visible between the two boys actually did say: body found at dump.

The Cupboard

I'd shut myself in the cupboard directly beneath the work-bench in the big shed and made a nest among the torn newsprint and the bits of wood-shaving. I'd been there for over an hour before the grey-haired woman dragged me out by my elbow and cuffed me about the ear. Then she told me I was stupid and shoved me in another cupboard.

The Gift of Happiness

He possessed the gift of happiness. One day while passing a doorway he bent down to tie up a loose shoelace. As he did so someone tapped him on the shoulder, yet when he turned round there was no one there. But happiness — and I mean happiness — had descended on him. His spirits instantly lightened as he marched blissfully forward, secure in the knowledge that he could now endure the pain of a shoelace whipping against his ankle or the pointed gaze of the passers-by. But what, you may ask, caused them to stare? The fact that he wore nothing but shoes? Or the fact that one of his shoelaces was loose?

Imagine

The hospital overlooks a park at the edge of the city centre. If you stand at any one of its high windows on a late afternoon in autumn, at that moment when the city

floods its tiered milk-crates with light you are likely to see a band of young men running back and forth in the park. They could be Apaches but are in fact footballers, for they are tossing a red leather ball along their line and shouting encouragement to each other. Rather strangely, their cries of 'Good Pass!' and 'Here! Here!' can be heard above the noise of the home-bound traffic.

Yet every now and again their shouts play second-fiddle to another cry. From somewhere behind you in the hospital ward an old bed-ridden man is intermittently shouting 'Whee...

Whee!' While you can have no idea what game he thinks he is playing, the fact that no one either answers or echoes his cry suggests that it could be life. Yet you cannot, of course, put this to him; if life it be, its nature insists that he should be treated as a child.

Imagine, therefore, that he is being pushed to-and-fro on a swing. Or imagine that he is taking part in his first egg-and-spoon race.

Afterlife

You wake in the middle of the night and hear whispers in the adjoining room. Though you are fearful at first, your curiosity soon gets the better of you. Silently as you can, you creep across the floor and put your ear to the door. The whispers continue.

But when you fling open the door and turn on the light there is no one to be seen. Silence reigns in this room in which pieces of cane furniture are ranged about the walls and the faces of ancestors stare out from the frames with what, you suspect, is a shocked and slightly aggrieved expression.

Of course, there are whispers to be heard the next time you wake in the middle of the night. Once more you creep across the floor, but instead of trying to catch the culprits red-handed you now embark on a more subtle approach. Stealthily as you can, you open the door and creep into the darkened room. The whispers continue.

You are just about to shout when you notice a curious thing. The voices, which now can be heard distinctly, all employ an idiom which is slightly out of date. One couches its remarks in the diction and high solemn tones of Victorian times; another is breezily familiar and seems to belong to the Jazz Age.

But by now your crouching position has helped you to make another discovery. For as you turn your head this way and that your radar becomes increasingly adept at pin-pointing the direction of each voice. One, you say to yourself, must come from that point just up there; another from this corner here. When each voice whispers again your inference is confirmed.

Your next action is made in response to an unspoken moral command. Summoning all your stealth, you crawl backwards out of the room and leave these voices to enjoy their ghostly afterlife. In talking to each other without fear of disturbance, these photographs are simply acknowledging the darkness in which they were born.

The Desertion

1.

He opened his mouth as wide as he could, then rested his head against the hard mud wall directly behind him. The bird stepped closer, then dropped the twisting worm into his mouth. He could hear his teeth crushing up grains of sand as he chewed on the worm. The worm tasted surprisingly sweet.

2.

When he finished he shook his arms and tried to chirp at the bird still perched immediately above his head. But the only sounds which came out of his mouth were 'More! More!' The bird continued to look down at him; it did not blink.

3.

He knew that the bird would not be returning with a second worm when it hopped off the mud wall and flew around the nest, cawing as it did so. He also knew that he'd have to make his own way down to the ground. He had seen the ground. It was miles and miles below the small mud nest in which he had chewed on the sand-encrusted worm.

Calendar

I remember that year when I used to look at a picture of a young dark-haired girl holding a bunch of pink roses to her face. I knew that she existed somewhere, and I knew that if only I could find her she would step into my life. That was more than thirty years ago, yet even now I can still see myself seated at the kitchen table, from which I gaze at the calendar and simultaneously swing my bare feet so that they make a dry sandpapery sound as they scrape across the lino. And with every swing I ask myself what name I should cry out when I turn at the sound of the uncoiled hinges and find her standing in the door.

Poem

It was as though she was looking down from a great height, for she always appeared to hold something back when she asked me how I had slept. I came to believe that the words she refused to speak were hidden inside the darkness of her head; they floated there, out of reach, impervious to anything that I could say or do. This is the picture I have whenever I think of her now, though I know that her hair has gone grey, that her skin has withered, and that those grey-blue eyes flecked with hazel are eyes I shall not see again. But I can still feel the weight of her body as she sat on the edge of the bed and looked down at me from that great height.

Image

When I looked once more
that fish I'd seen
gasping on the shore
of a poisoned sea

turned out to be
just a pair of scissors
lying on the floor
at the foot of my chair.

Sign

Inured, by circumstance,
to seeing the sky
as either a shroud
or a slab of lead

you can't get over the fact
that this one's so blue
— and are led to assume

that God still exists.

Rain

As rain begins
to play its Tin
Pan Alley tunes
on the iron roof

the dog takes it into
his head to jitterbug
about the kitchen
in his muddy boots.

Ars Poetica

Even if only
for a single time
I'd like to mime
the soft, descending

‘Shh’ that these leaves make
when they come to sense
the wind's presence
in a nearby tree.

Wholemeal Loaf

Whenever it's surrounded
by at least four
varieties of quiche
or a whole raft of gâteaux

even the lightest loaf
is liable to look as if
it's a lump of masonry
from a demolition site.

Last Leg

Having just seen his
first three legs come home
in the quadrella
the novice punter

is quite adamant
that he'll soon be off
to Vanuatu
— by magic carpet.

Moment

Startled by a sound
like the final phut
an old outboard makes
before it conks out

I look round and see
that a silver-eye
must have shaved my ear
when it powered by.

Horse

As we skid into
the shallow ditch
at the edge of the road
three crows explode

from the paddock's dry grass
and a ghost-grey horse
swishes its tail
in the shade of a tree.

Apparition

As you appreciate
the true spiritual things
I think I should tell you
of that spring evening

when the jasmine bush
shone so brightly
I gazed at an angel
unfolding its wings.

An Affirmation

Because we have created
this terrible world
in which you live
it is our hope

that these lines prove:
some of us believed
in the virtues of grass,
in the wisdom of stones.

Stone

The stone is about three inches in length and looks just like a finger. I, who found it in the cold waters of a mountain stream, can tell you little about it. But I do know this: if you cradle it in your hand and allow it to be permeated by the warmth of your blood, at some indeterminate moment it will curl back and tickle you with its tip, the texture of which is remarkably similar to that of a cat's tongue. In view of this, there is no reason for me to repeat: the stone is about three inches in length and looks just like a finger.

Grass

"I know. I should not be so fond of this grass whose razor-thin blades have left their mark on my skin. But its smell, its smell! Do you remember that vaguely

sugary aroma you used to detect when, tired of walking through the empty paddocks, you hunched over the ground and sniffed at the entrance to an ant's nest? Well, that is the smell of this grass.”

Water

Two rocks stand in the middle of the creek. In flowing over the one on the left, which is the taller of the two, the water pretends that it is a mass of ringlets bobbing about on the head of a running girl. Now turn to the one on the right and ask yourself just what we see. Is this really water, this flat sheet which bends — crisply, and on cue — and then falls down in stiff and regimented pleats?

Bush Lullaby

If it is understandable that I should have mistaken that small white nest snagged at the top of a wild rose for a baby's bootie, it is equally understandable that whenever I think of it I have the strong impression that it is swaying, ever so gently, in the wind.

The Behaviour of Trucks

Trucks behave so strangely late at night. How they mutter to themselves when they slow down and manoeuvre their large and impractical bulk around a corner! How they roar triumphantly when they speed past the street of little dogs!

Things

Listen. Forget that face. Here are your nails. And here is the hammer you must use if you want to drive them into that bit of wood.

Pastoral

for Helen

1.

A cloudless, windless day at the beginning of winter. You drive down from the hills, where the leaf-filtered light delves into gullies and picks out the course of a creek half-smothered in blackberries, then come to a valley broken into a patchwork of geometric shapes by the grey-blue lines of roads and the dark, cold and heavy green of the cypress hedges. Almost everywhere you look the same scenes repeat themselves: a black bull, its shape etched as sharply as a figure on a medieval banner, ambles across a homestead paddock, ducks parade on the verandah of an old farmhouse, and a flock of geese, each one as fat and heavy as a Spanish galleon, moves in convoy fashion across the waters of a dam.

2.

The light has already begun to fail as you make your way back through the valley. You drive past dams collaged with the shadows of nearby trees, past a cemetery stranded on a rise at the edge of a small town, then follow the road as it winds up into the hills. When you look back you are startled to see that the floor of the valley is scattered with galaxies of lights, and suddenly you understand that you have been cast adrift on the most pacific and buoyant of oceans... And there, just out of reach, the new moon to guide you home.

True Discoveries

It was what? Three? No, *four* years ago that I discovered it. I was trudging across the sand when I came to a small depression whose perimeter was lined with upright feathers. My intuitions told me that this was the remains of Nefertiti's barge, for right at its bottom there lay a flat white object whose shape was uncannily reminiscent of the map of Africa. Before the waves had cast it ashore twenty or so molluscs had attached themselves to the coast of this small white map. And there it lay, before me on the sand.

Astonished at my discovery, I crouched down and looked more closely. Only then did I realise that its little bomb-like appendages were concentrated in two places, for six or seven were crowded into the Bay of Sidra and a similar number dangled from the Cape of Good Hope. By now fully aware that this Africa was the real thing, I trembled somewhat as I placed it in the small box which contained my other discoveries of this day — a few choice *opercula*, a miniature tube of Juvena Sun Care Cream, and a piece of wood in the shape of a whale. And then I walked on, secure in the knowledge that the world contained whole continents which, even now, are awaiting their true discoverer.

The City

The city is full of surprises. You find yourself walking along one of its busiest streets very close to its heart, and on stepping past a small lane you hear the sound of budgerigars trilling away and are simultaneously overcome by the smell of basil. In much the same fashion you turn out of an equally busy street and stroll over to a small park wedged between a couple of skyscrapers, and what do you find there but a crow energetically whetting its dagger on your favourite bench?

Auguries

You don't need to look all that closely in order to see that the new gallery has a very bright future. I say this because the bullet hole in its front window and the sign which warns its patrons that they enter at their own risk both certify that it already has more than its fair share of street credibility.

Jigsaw

The churches were all
made of weatherboard
and the post office part
of the general store.

You're quite certain
that the fibro house was painted
a slightly greenish off-white.

In the kitchen,
a picture of Jesus
surrounded by medals

and the young Queen's face
on a biscuit tin.

Even in the dark
you were able to trace
all the yellow flowers
embroidered at the edge
of the green hessian bedspread.

It always surprised me
how new everything seemed
in the morning: even

the patterned oilcloth
on the kitchen table looked new,
even the worn lino.

Every morning the
old man would slowly
break up a piece of

buttered inch-thick toast
and drop it into
his plate of milk coffee.

Kneeling in the door
of the darkened shed
a man in khakis
was fixing the lid
of an old saucepan.

Whenever I heard
the clunk of a washer
landing on the bottom
of an old tobacco tin

I knew a mynah bird
had come to roost
on the corrugated roof
of the chicken shed.

You'd never
select a hoe

without first
gauging its weight

and running your hand
down the length of its shaft.

At times there would be
a couple of hens
in the front window of
Georgescu's house.

Even when the Pope
had said it was OK
the old woman refused
to touch meat on a Friday.
Because of this

there would always be
a couple of smoked fish
hanging from the rafters
of the unlined laundry
at the back of the house.

If you stood on the back step
you'd catch a whiff
of the gulley-trap

but once inside
the great drum-like cake
of pecorino

hidden away in one
of the kitchen cupboards
would be all you could smell.

At the back of Georgescu's place
the bush was unapproachable:
so melancholy, so smoke-blue.

The churches were all
made of weatherboard
and the post office part
of the general store.

City Meditation

Although this city
that our fathers
have bequeathed us
is a poor place
in which to pray

I'd like to kneel
above bare trees
in total silence,
then think of what
it may be like

in six months' time:
the trees, by then,
should have new leaves,
and nothing of
this city will be seen

when I pause once more
at the window, kneel
completely in silence
— and then look down
into the street.

Here

I couldn't begin to tell you
how happy it made me feel
when I learnt that you wished to stay

and make this place your home.
Other countries, I'm certain,
could offer a great deal more

in the way of tangible rewards,
but where else would you feel
as secure as you do here? Far

from the turmoil and upheavals
of other, less fortunate states,
we should count ourselves lucky

that the only problems we have to face
revolve around our increasingly
futile attempts to cope with boredom

and a vague sense that all
the really interesting things in life
are found elsewhere.

Description

It is the first warm day of spring. You lean on your shovel and look up at the sky, which is empty except for a single cloud nestling on the horizon in the west. It is just like a tug-boat and hardly moves when you calibrate its position against the green waves of the trees.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later, when you once more look up at the sky, you are startled to find that the tug-boat has disappeared. Has it vanished beneath the waves? Or has it simply chugged to the opposite horizon, where a cloud is lazily forming itself into what you can only describe as a question mark?

Evening

for Rick Amor & Meg Williams

The sun had just begun to pull its dark blue blanket over its head when I stepped onto the verandah and looked down at the footpath which ran before the hotel. It was deserted but for a dog, which had taken up its position next to a 'No Parking' sign and was gazing at the front door in which its master, it hoped, would soon appear.

The scene across the bay was equally pedestrian. As night had fallen by now, the headlands had nudged their pillows closer to the sea and were preparing to drift off to sleep. Should I mention the rhythmic music of the waves? Or should I turn once more to that lonely dog, which was still sitting beside the 'No Parking' sign and had not yet begun to howl?

Park

True. But some things about it remind me of a travel poster. That green, for a start, is too bright, too flat, and much too chemical. And what is one to make of the fact that those shadows look as though they've been stencilled to the grass?

Silhouette

The silence is broken by a muffled thump as a cat leaps from a window sill to the wooden boards of a verandah. It appears that the sound goes unnoticed by everyone asleep in the house. Yet someone picks it up, for just two doors away a sleeper instantly incorporates it into his dream and transforms it into an earth—shattering explosion whose reverberations — *kaboom, kaboom* — are sufficiently frightening to cause him to wake.

When he lifts his head from the pillow and peers through a slit in the curtained window, what should he see but a ginger cat silhouetted in a pool of light beneath a streetlamp. Although he will dream again before the night is over, this cat — still ginger, still silhouetted in a pool of light — is the first thing he will remember when he wakes again in the morning.

Translation

There's absolutely no one to be seen. Yet you're certain there's someone directly behind that line of trees, for when you hear the sound that comes from that direction — the sound, to be precise, of a thirsty dog drinking from a bowl of water — you

know that you can safely translate: horse on blue metal road, walking slowly.

Representation

“It's the audacity of it that I like. Anyone can idly scratch through that dark blue surface and thereby expose those patches of white paper, but how many people would think of passing the thing off as a picture of the heavens? Why, if I had to do something like that, I'd be forced to suggest that these sixty or so words formed some kind of self portrait.”

Thoughts

Those trees in the distance have gone through so many transformations that I hardly know where to begin. I could start with a thought-balloon, for that is what they initially appeared to be when I glimpsed them between the haybales' Maginot Line. Or should I start with a fly-swatter, for that is what they have become as we stretch our legs on the red dirt and brush at our mouths and eyes?

But already I have a better idea. If I can't think of them as parachutes just about to crumple as they touch earth, I'd like to propose that each one of them is a table-tennis bat. Look, if you listen really hard you'll even hear a ball whizz past your ear at a speed as fast as that of thought itself.

The Physics of Falling Words

Paul Valéry once remarked that each word is a bottomless abyss. This observation, which at first strikes one as profound, in fact misrepresents the matter, for words should be more accurately likened to the stones we habitually throw into an abyss.

It is apparent that not all words fall in the same way. Heavy words, the sort of words which are capable of sinking a battleship or of driving Candide to suicide, generally fall in a straight line and therefore make no sound — or at least no sound that our ears can detect.

But lighter words — and by this I mean the more delicately coloured adjectives and those words whose vowels trail off into air — fall differently. Mimicking the feathers to which they are often likened, these words dance themselves into oblivion in what could be described as a spiralling course.

Yet how do we construe the pings they make as they strike the sides of the abyss? If we are to believe those who have studied this matter — the physics, I suggest, of falling words — these pings are nothing more than the sounds inevitably produced when a solid object, such as a falling word, meets another solid object, in this case the walls of the abyss.

Maybe so. But let me canvass another explanation. Imagine that you were picked up by the scruff of the neck and tossed into nothingness. Wouldn't you scream?

The same, surely, applies to words, or at least to those which cannot be used as a weapon. The drowning send up their bubbles of air... and words that sharp, high, reverberating cry.

Creek

You can say what you like out here, but the trees and the rocks will always ignore you. And as for the creek, it likes to burble to itself and simulate voice after voice — a bit like a widow who has got into the habit of pretending that she still leads a rich social life.

Sacred Site

It's easy to see that this clearing is important to someone, for there are four old armchairs grouped around the remains of a fire at what would be its exact centre. And this is not to ignore the sounds you hear as you near this sacred site: first the screech of the cockatoos, so like the sound of chalk on a blackboard that you flinch at the *whish!* of the teacher's cane, then the *Oh Ah Oh Ah* of a kookaburra, and finally the delicate tinkling sound of an unseen bird as you step into the clearing and make your way to what you believe is the heart of the bush.

Insomnia

Thank God I'm not like that anymore!
Young men who still insist on logic
after their twenty-fifth year
should be requisitioned by the law,
be made to learn the psychologic
end of their beautiful, clear

thinking before the passing of one
more extraordinary year. From the
Simplistic States over there
the news now comes through that cars have won
the right to vote; just over the seas
they think it just and fair

that beasts of burden have the same rights
as the ordin'ry, tame, two-legg'd thing.
After all, democracy
demands it. Quite so, I say. These nights
press on me with their huge beating wing.
At dawn, sometimes, I can see

the shape of things to come: the small rain
vanishing—piracy in the sky.
I go to sleep very late
troubled by the fear that I'm insane
rocked by the proletarian cry
of that enfranchised estate.

Two Nocturnes

On a high branch
darkness is waiting.
You gather
my borrowed skin
into your trunk.

Moonlight nibbles
at our window-pane, touching
your warm curves
with its tongue, shedding
cool light
on a great machine.

Stars

Although the scientists say
the light that reaches us
is millions of years old

if I had to guess
I'd say the stars were happy
and want to impress.

ALEX SKOVRON

b. 1948

Alex Skovron was born in 1948 in Chorzów, near Katowice, Poland. He left Poland with his parents in late 1956, and lived for more than a year in Israel before arriving in Australia in March 1958. He attended Randwick Boys' High School in Sydney, then completed a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree at the University of New South Wales, and an MA in Government at the University of Sydney. After graduating from university, he took up an editorial position with the *Australian Encyclopaedia* (Grolier), later becoming general editor of the *Concise Encyclopaedia of Australia* (Horwitz). He moved to Melbourne in 1979, working as an educational editor for Macmillan, and subsequently as a senior editor with Hutchinson, Dent and Houghton Mifflin. More recently, he has worked as a freelance editor. He is married with two children.

Skovron began writing poetry in the late 1960s, but only started publishing his work in the early 1980s. His first collection, *The Rearrangement* (1988), attracted a great deal of critical attention for its complex and innovative formal organisation, and won both the FAW Anne Elder Poetry Award and the ASAL Mary Gilmore Award for the best first book of poetry. Skovron has since published a further four poetry collections; each has again demonstrated his intricate thematic patterning and command of poetic form. He has also published a novella, *The Poet* (2005).

On the Theology of Ants

Picture an insect
circling a lifetime
in a covered jar. Secure the jar
inside a canvas bag stuffed with
faded clothing, rags and torn stockings.
Enclose this in a suitcase full of books
and old journals, sealed, strapped and slotted
in the back of a rusting station wagon
locked in a cluttered shed. Now imagine
that the garage is appended to a cottage
strung to a tree within a sprawling suburb
whose proximity to the city is ambiguous.
Elevate your vantage to locate the black towers
puncturing clouds that suspend them in space. Go
higher, higher, to incorporate the spill
of a massed metropolis, and then its edges
fringing the urban dusk and blending fast
with fields and pastures, plains and rolling earth.
A moment, and you stack
the crisscrossed chiaroscuro geometric grid
slanting, sliding north — and to the south, and west,
and east into the sea. Then the horizon and the end
of earth: receding, fading, darkening,
unreal — perspectives vanish, and
the thud of black.

The imprisoned ant,
still circling, nearly dead,
has spent his life devising metaphysics.
He has thought out the nature of the universe,
the origins of matter, the designs of time.
Serene and certain, he loves the calm of knowledge,
prepares glowingly to confront his Maker:

Whom most of his kind believe to be sixlegged
but his own rarer perception, its divining spirit,
already can sense more correctly ...

Sisyphus

I choose my boulders carefully,
They are scattered like words across the white plain;
I scoop my syntax from the clouds' dictionary —
The path to wisdom is difficult, rich and mundane.
I have my nostalgia, the soft exquisite aching
That lulls and lacerates; and I can dream
The dazzling city that drives upward to the horizon
Beyond the land where the rumbling boulders lean.
One evening soon, as the crescent overtakes me,
I'll slip discreetly over the edge of the plain
And into the valley beyond, because I know
The song of terrible grace that summons me.
But the clouds are backing away; an exquisite pain
Is pleading for me to stay. How can I go?

Theorem

I dreamt
I was crossing a swampy channel
I had stumbled upon.
I walked sluggishly, my feet in mud, but when
I lifted my eyes to the fragrant sky
I was astonished by its depth and beauty.

I tried to reach out, upward, but discovered
I only sank more deep into the mud.
I looked down, then looked up again.
Something was wrong, I knew.

A Concise History of the Moon

for the moon is never but a month old ...
— *Love's Labour's Lost*

I *Full*

She crosses herself
the old woman. Night after night
one blind sleepwalker can recall nothing
of the sun. And when she opens her eye wide
she is drifting
anciently, a ball of bone with a lid
on the blackening future. She smiles, almost
like a great grandmother
in her private particular satisfactions
or an infant at the telescope's opposite end
propped up among her sandbox computations
stacking time.

II *Waning Crescent*

If you look up
If you consider what it is you have lost
If you frame the disc like a metaphor through a spyglass
fondle it like a warm marble in your palm
pronounce it like a mantra rounding your tongue
If you look up and consider
the breeze of ice crossing the night into your lashes
and stripping
open your mouth to the distances between you
and close your eyes
and make love to the breeze that no longer knows you
Trying to remember
Trying to remember the moon and the silence of the moon
and open your touch to an ancient fear
shoving hard against its womb
Trying to recall
why the birth to be will shut forever
this chamber you have scratched your lifetime into
Trying to recall so much
and so much more beyond recalling
If you do all this
and still count yourself a survivor
and expose your eye to the swivelling moon
and smile
and swing your face into the clock behind you
always behind you
If you do all this
you will have conquered the invisible again
you will probably turn and cross the blustering moor

and forget the old-woman moon
fidgeting peacefully above you
always above you
You will forget that a moon was once your mandala
forget the fear
return to the cities of the morning smouldering in their history
rebuilding themselves as they have always done
relearning all the orthodox betrayals
recalling
the slumbering creatures from their caverns under the heart
and the world will go on
If you do all this
and nothing will have changed
only the moon
like a mother you have sacrificed forever
crossing herself night after night
And you will forget as you have always forgotten
even if you remember
even if you pause to recall the song of an ancient woman
even
If you look up

III *New*

Every dome we built is overgrown with tendrils,
They say the time to civilize our satellite
Is coming soon;
Architects and doctors, planners with their pencils
Design and theorize and calibrate
For living-room.
Thinking stops the blood, a mounting terror festers,
The leaving of a land is no small sacrifice
Even for us;
Seldom in the drunkenest dreams of our ancestors
Could such an odyssey have been devised
We dare at last.
Trapped between the smell of history and stasis,
We plot a future where forgetfulness will cross
The crescent Earth;
Children we encounter (ours or something else's)
Will seek in vain within their glossaries
The word for birth.

IV *Waxing Gibbous*

Sometimes your face would be the imprint
on a secret letter
meticulously folded. Sometimes you were legible,
just — like an alphabet
at the bottom of a pool, or a poet
teen-eyed but beginning to turn
to a don with a beard scanning every row
with suspicion. Sometimes

you'd vanish with a scoundrel's tact, or look
the other way — as when a schoolboy
stuck on a cricket-field discovered something
in his pocket. And
while you flooded his volumes on the topmost shelf,
friends in high places
sometimes pressed balcony railings waiting for you,
their dark drives
mapped out like old Verona, the lamp
at the top of the rickety lane
a cliché but a backseat compass. Your beam
for the first was a firefly's newel,
for the second a cable inviting incredible men
to devise footfalls. But
you — you were always the silent type, Asian
for all the centuries of rhetoric,
your face creased like a careless page ...
Today the distances
behind a face unfold into the infancy of moons.
To remove the crease from a letter
it is necessary sometimes to refold it.

V *Full*

My bed is relentless.
The blanket squats about an upraised knee,
my pillow is whistling in my ear.
The rectangle I'm regarding from a small distance
holds back the window-frame.
There could easily be a curtain:
there is no curtain.
The sky is incontinently blue
somewhere to the west; here
there's a dark side being enacted.
On the cubical bedside table a timepiece
glints like a handcuff draped for dead
but coming, coming — the four zeros of midnight:
I close my eyes to hold them.
In truth the sky outside is navy black.
If I looked into it
through the window's phlegmatic tunnel
I could arrest the ooze of a cloud.
This notion seduces: at the point of no return
the corner of her eye
hooks on to mine —
The moon ... A ringtail
chronically entangled in the beams above
scrapes like a tedious thought,
a spiteful motorcyclist lacerates the night:
glissandos unsettle me —
I think of sirens, the wailing
of the ghost train to Treblinka,

Craters of an unseen topography ...
I think of what I have never lost,
I float out through the ceiling like Chagall
and peruse the village, a tablecloth
into the past. I measure
ten thousand years of dripping candlewax
wasted, burnt in vain.
And I hear the slide of the logical ocean
of seconds, centuries, crushing
the cry from the throat of logicians.
I weigh the heft of an axe, its logic;
the twig treason of a doddering pencil.
I taste the black olive of a love
lapping at its bitter stone self.
And I listen to animals under the roof
drunken for crumbs, discover a map
riddled with daggers crossing into the distance.
I am dizzy from lusts
accomplished in the name of blood, flesh,
Eternity:
they swirl before me like stars ...
And the moon:
the crazy circle's fleeting symmetry
between the boards of the bedroom I return to.
It is crossed again by the swim of vapours
older by far than any Tranquil Sea:
and it melts into my mouth.
I sleep, and dream of light.

Night Journeys

Yes, he would plunder the stations into dawn
for vistas that shone between flickering pylons
before the tunnel overtook again; for reflections
other than his own in the tunnelled glass
black as recognition; for the tap on shoulder
that might soften, turn the lurid twilight

into a white pool of recognition, reunion. Yes,
he scoured the night, leaning out of his dreams,
reckless to swallow the hooting wind,
squinting to decipher the stations, the graffiti.

Starry Night

Watching them burn
the cobblestones shimmering
the crooked streets whispering
among themselves
the fire exulting, the flames
straining towards history

Watching them melt
into the common ecstasy
of cities, blaze with the fury of belonging
as the great pages curl.

Waking in the Small Hours

You know, you wonder the reason the night
picks always the exposed hours — too late
to quicksand back into the mothering oblivion
of sleep, too soon to play dawn, pre-empt
another morning's already loaded carillon
of desires, too dark to vigil beside a dissolving tent

of print or a page like this one, misting at the edges,
listening for lamps — wonder the reason
this rickety quadrant of the face is always the one
reflecting, from the bedside table, yours.

PAM BROWN

b. 1948

Born in Victoria, growing up mainly in Queensland, Pam Brown has lived in Sydney since 1968. She has made her living variously and has taught writing, multi-media studies and filmmaking. Until 2007 she spent sixteen years engaging in the pleasures of classification as an employee in the life sciences library at the University of Sydney. She has been a poetry editor for various publications and is currently associate editor for Jacket2 magazine.

Since 1971, Pam Brown has published fourteen books and four chapbooks of poetry and prose, including *This World. This Place*, *50-50*, *Text thing* and most recently *Dear Deliria*, which won the 2004 NSW Premier's Award for Poetry. She has also written reviews, articles, film scripts and performance texts. Brown was the poetry editor of the national literary quarterly *Overland* magazine from 1997 to 2002. She is currently a contributing editor for the US-based literary annual *Fulcrum* and the online journal *HOW*. She has been a guest of the Festival Franco-Anglais de Poésie in Paris, France and the Berlin International Literature Festival in Germany. In 2003 she lived for six months in the Australia Council poets' flat in Rome, Italy. During that time she was also a guest at the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Barcelona in Spain.

Pam Brown's work reads like a particle map, a range of trajectories arcing off into open space, determining that space through movement, velocity and the inertia created, at times shocking associated bodies (poetic, politic, cultural, critical) into action and reaction. Her voice has maintained a consistent edge and vitality, and perhaps peculiarly enough for one often at odds with the lyric, or at least the *lyrical*, it has remained *her* voice. There is a distinctive intimacy to Brown's work; a familiar persona at play, not just tinkering with the engine of language but opening the throttle and revving it with glee, skill and a wry look at the road – language, poetry – ahead and behind ('those afternoons/ were arvos,/ when a tranny was a radio,/ smash repairs/ were panel-beating.).

Her work is local, takes on the hue and scape of her surroundings, shaded by an acute awareness of the shifting way language changes and so changes those surrounds, how fads fade and the dialect reflects the analect:

20th century

*When the couch became a sofa
We sat down in front of pay-TV
& replaced our 'hmmm' with 'wow' –
It's all just clothes, makeup and hair.
And as we were the tootlers
we tootled along to the popular
anytime anyplace big brown & orange
inflatable bouncy castle to contest
the awards for untrammeled enthusiasm.
(from *Dear Deliria*)*

Brown's gift for pastiche accompanies the possibility that the self is never anything much more than a daily work of bricolage. For that knowledge, Brown's poetry never fails to give – and give generously with great humour and acuity – a critically appraised delight in the world. There is a ferocity to her wit guided by a gracious, ironic and optimistic self, at ease with the oddness of the world, deftly responding to the ever-surprising “ludicrous pageant/ of history” as with the critical faculties that engages it:

*in another time,
over a light lunch
Professor Jacques
told me to expect
a monograph
on same-day service
& I confided, as an editor,
(as I am)
that my main endeavour,
aiming high,
was to find,
within a regularly
stupefying wodge
of writings,
witty poems about, say,
paperclips.
we smiled –
“writing is such
a mad game”
he whispered.
(‘Aiming high’ from *Dear Deliria*)*

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Saxe Blue Sky (Thursday Morning)

the millennium train
 whips past
 the tollway to the Harbour Bridge
CHANGE GIVEN CHANGE GIVEN AUTO COINS ONLY
 in bright orange
 against a saxe blue sky.
the gigantic matchsticks sculpture,
 one burnt, one phosphorous red and ready,
 jutting up
 from a closely trimmed mound of couch.
a bronze frieze in capital letters, on the corner
 of the NSW Art Gallery —
 CHRISTOPHER WREN, (old cosmopolitan),
 (Thomas) GAINSBOROUGH —
 flashes by,
 seventeenth and eighteenth century ghosts,
 glimpsed like brief suggestions, or notes,
as I enter the drab tunnel
 towards Martin Place
on my way
 to advance automation,
 to sort a set of bookbinding cards
(discard, edit, or keep,
 according, fo course,
 to a method)
cards detailed with
 pencilled handwriting,
 traces of colleagues
 now moved on.
 I remember most of them,
more, I remember their memos,
circulated notes —
 our names listed,
 stapled to a corner,
memo read, name ticked, then passed along
 to the next name —
pre-email,
 and computers then exclusive to data,
the binding card
 mimicking book spines,
a card index
 the instrument of record.

the train squeals into Redfern
 I emerge from the dim light
deep under the city
 to see the saxe blue sky

look smoggier,
pale grey-brown on the horizon,
from here, in the inner west,
the way I walk to work,
the block — the aboriginal housing co-operative —
demolished, gone.
another set of glimpses, whisps,
traces of people
now moved on.
on this frosty thursday morning
only a small group of revenants
warming up around
a smoking 44-gallon drum.

Patti Smith Was Right

these cold, known objects
are not very likeable –
aluminium frames
& curved glass with optical tricks –
but I *am* ‘at ease’
at this show,
there are some nice little-grin ideas –
like television
screening outside
on the suburban home’s front lawn,
& time-delay verité videos
to amuse the usually uncrackable
hardened gallery-goer

✻

have I flipped ? into a strangely placid
 political zone a lack of clutter
and environmental concern –
these things are so simple,
 two hours here & I begin to enjoy
 Dan Graham
more than Soutine, Braque, Delaunay,
 Bourgeois, Basquiat, Sherrie Levine,
 Agnes Martin – although
I can not deny my memory
 of her beautiful mid-1960's picture –
 ‘Milk River’ –
nor her small collection
 of pick-up trucks – the green Chevie
glinting with polish – the very driveable
Dodge parked
outside her desert home.

✻

I spend over an hour watching,
surrendering to
Dan Graham's big "Rock/God" video
that makes a simple
anthropological connection
between US tribal & religious ritual –
group dancing, shaking, speaking in tongues –
and mosh pits and rock music –
so when Patti Smith sings
*"Jesus died for somebody's sins
but not mine"*

I am converted.

*

Patti Smith was right,
twenty-five years ago,
to say that rock music,
meaning, then, for her, punk-rock,
would replace painting
& sculpture
as representative of untranscended
life itself.

Cubists in Suburbia

monday's twilight dimming
 on the last few brown leaves
 of dreary autumn,
thin branches jut
 like grissini
from camouflage-patterned trunks,
 it's the plane tree the tree
 the Cubists loved the most,
the light, green grey,
 they loved that too.

Fall To Float

I've forgotten what to do
and I should be keeping that
to myself
not to be *too* lyrical
yet I'd plunge
into a field of flowers
on earth's fat crust
shake my petalled brow
filter every speck
of pollen from my fringe
the woman who fell to earth
like david bowie did
but with my luck
and if the dead do sleep
they'd be sleeping there
where I'd land
I'd land and lie
until the pleiades
start to blink their signal
that the time is right
to plant the herb
to cast the seed
to go home to bed
but there's so much light
in this hydrocarbon wonderland
the night sky is hard to see
by day I'd float
on the tyrrhenian sea
surrounded by a haze of ghosts
moaning of failed crossings
gazing up at a wide sky
thin white cirrostratus sheets
stretching all the way
back to tunisia

Spirulina To Go

if you haven't been lost
 at the showground,
in the bush, in Westfield Plaza,
 on an island

you may not know
 the perpetual present
 is exhausting,

way too many
 concurrent points of view,

– something too free in aleatory –

and further,
 a burden – a century
 of hortatory Steinisms,
Yes, that's how I read it –

 famously, she says
'a sentence is not emotional, a paragraph is'

the 'difficult' Stein at her best

 'Think carefully of nouns.
Vary and think very think very once
 and once more of a noun a noun they like'

DRINKING STRAW — there's your noun, mrs!
 hope you like it

*

discussing Immaculate Conception
 on the landline

&

Original Sin –
 who *knows* what it is?

does an individual matter?
 (immeasurable)

*

boys own rumbles by
 on a rusted bicycle
ruining the dawn's bleak dream,

the flattened one,
where you emerge from the lake
and wave, almost languidly

*

there's the dribbling bronze boar
outside Sydney hospital,
its snout shiny from stroking

dwelling
on isolation (don't dwell)
and other sad feelings (shouldn't dwell)
like a detainee in this,
the inadequate body

red bumps
bigger than goosebumps –
but not exactly pimple size
more weals than welks

who can understand the nurse
when she phones
with the laboratory test data?

*

No one ever here, no footpath crowd,
every knock of a hinge is creepy
crack of a floorboard,
rustle and gust

perhaps it's revelatory,
or will be

can the past catch up with you

*

problem – how to begin the music,
harder than beginning a poem?

the ringtone
was the sound of that decade

if you just keep turning up
on time

eventually

might rain photons

*

that'd be good

*

you're embarrassed
by my slurp
when I'm
guzzling spirulina
but
I've been to my personal best
and back —
I'm not worried

*

early intervention buys time,
how much is time these days?
(a cheap question)

*

if you see something
say something —
This is *everything I could want*
in a lifetime of products

*

pulling on another shirt
over two shirts
as weather
sets in
standing in the clothes
that you once wore

*

hours sitting in one spot
a rosella fell, lodged dead in the branches,
I took it down
and buried it behind the begonia
a new cicada began to chirr

*

I've been coasting,
a clown visiting a conservatorium,

time now for application

I want to reach the inhumans,
find the kind of poetry
that appeals to them,
to their original intelligence,
and then,
struck by enargia, Propriety Limited is us

*

Unable to afford
the G'Day Highway Motel,
I sleep in a car in its shadow

while

the town that makes
the world's supply
of plastic drinking straws
is booming

*

the dendrite moves slowly
towards the synapse –
arrives two weeks later

*WISHING YOU
A SPEEDY RECOVERY*

the light here is so dim

*

an indestructible host organism
has the softest touch

strike another match, go start anew

Rehab For Everyone

hands so cold
 fingers cold
tucked under legs
 sitting in insect hiss
 low white noise
 gas heater undertone
 no other sound
 nothing

almost asleep,
 a car pulling up the hill

 a currawong
does that shrill thing
 into pink air

a huge open yawn
 almost breaks my jaw

 the pen that makes the marks
 alters the angles of the letters

a patch
 of yesterday's chocolate
 stuck to my corduroy sleeve –
a signal
 imagined and interpreted

we look back
 at the years in the tops
 waiting to be taken out of time

red brick
 wall map of Australia
 grass green carpet
mustard coloured plastic chairs
 clumpy piling on the mittens

mitts on the keyboard
 pushing thoughts and jingles
 out

 to Dublin to Seattle,
 Adelaide, Kane'ohe,
 Faversham, Glebe

sadly notating dim trivia
 me-minus-you

outside community

literary festivals
can't help anyone
like a rehab book sale

making mistakes,
so different
from being morally wrong

in an unsettling world
it's a rabbit life,
built the walls from Castrol cases

black tyre ribbons
strewn
like a giant's licorice
under the striated cutting
siding on the highway,
say goodbye
to the Woodford bends

sometimes the clunky
can incandesce
but I want to know
how to vitalize gawkiness,

sometimes
I'm in my no-mind sometimes
in a technological mindlessness
sometimes nowhere near limber,
although that's unusual

some people
just float along *all* the time
accumulating the placid

sometimes
when you think you're going down
you're not,
you're going straight ahead
to a utopia of modernity.

City

a yearned-for somewhere
adverb-physically
as lost as now
gazing across
the chunky valley
to a hill
of quivering lights

there is no
destination –
just a place
no site
not olympic
village site
not harbourside
casino site
nor section
of expressway
just east
of where
coincidence
has determined
your residence
in a city
you returned to
to remember
why you left

inventing
nostalgia
for elsewhere –
you'll live there
in the future

Scenes

what's graspable
on the starless night
of the blackout
as the gleaming cars
snake cautiously
up around
that hillside curve
is the way
the absence of street light
suggests the past –
not a past
I ever knew,
but one I make up, tonight

a boy slides through it
on a silver scooter,
coming back
from synagogue,
curly tails
dangling beneath
an embroidered yarmulke
perched like a lid
to imagination's
reckless feats
or dimmer prospects –
sets of fraying notebooks
filled with scripture

*

over the road
two very stoned spectres
can't figure out
how to turn off
the one
working headlight
on their old
silver BMW
so they leave it on
& hurry off
on foot,
jerkily,
on pills probably,
fags attached
to lower lips,
flat battery
a portent

*

an intense white light
shines down
through folding greys
on the isolated city –
it transforms
to a plastic model,
to a distant maquette,
like toys on my horizon

that white plastic bag
has been drifting
from the gutter
to the road
for three days,
when the rainwater
carries it off
to the Tasman Sea
I think I'll miss it.

Darkenings

born in a de-mountable, there you are now,
fifty-something years gone by not a disaster,
in the centre of the car-lined road,
a paper bag
tucked in the crook of your arm
with two paperbacks
and a poetry pamphlet.
no longer having much idea
of earlier versions of yourself
today bewildered
by some invented crisis
apparently necessary
for a cowardly killjoy
(whom you wish, of course,
to soon forget)
to end an already-fraying friendship,
but not so sentimental
as to crank the handle
once the rust has dusted the debts.

*

you go on vacation
to an unmodified landscape,
towards a blackout, the cause impossible to source,
to candle and fire,
to night's proper darkness,
you go to the bay
where sooty grey shearwaters
come down from Siberia
to bob stiff on the waves,
dead from exhaustion,
a flight from zero to infinity.

taking the news
from a smart eco liftout —
(international features
delivering “all you need to know”)
of war dunes and sand dunes
in deserts far away —
camels superseded
by four wheel drives,
date palms blown into blue yonder
and uranium-flecked scrapheaps
mapped as oases

there you are, back again,
 at the printer as covert,
 reading the back of the recycled paper,
 cipher and sign,
 vigilant under fluoro
 scrutinising discarded files of dissent -
 a single fist raised to the world
 expressionist texta
 “greetings from the resistance”
 but nobody’s watching, just shadow,
 nobody’s thinking
 that you’re here reading reports
 on indiscriminate transmissions —
 avian flu, Hendra virus, lyssa virus —
 insensible species’ leaps,
 no-bargains-pandemics,
 no clues in the notes from darkening science

no further treatment nothing to lose,
man with cancer carries his son
to lay him down in the contaminated ground.
nowhere left now,
moon ripple on the tailings dam
where he used to skip stones.

MICHAEL DRANSFIELD

1948 – 1973

Michael Dransfield was born in Sydney on 12 September 1948. He attended Sydney Grammar and (briefly) Sydney University. He worked for a while in the Australian Taxation Department as a clerk before drifting into the counter-culture and adopting the role of wandering minstrel, living mainly in the inner-city suburbs of Sydney but also travelling frequently between Queensland and Tasmania. He was a prolific writer of lyrical poems which gained wide attention early, and which later in his brief career came to focus more and more on drug experiences. Plagued by ill health and drug addiction, Dransfield died at the age of 24, on 20 April 1973, before his talent had fully matured, leaving behind close to a thousand poems.

Dransfield began publishing his poetry while still a teenager, his work appearing in poetry magazines and literary journals including *Poetry Australia*, *Meanjin* and *Overland*. His first poetry collection, *Streets of the Long Voyage*, was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1970, and he published two further collections during his lifetime; an almost complete manuscript was posthumously published as *Memoirs of a Velvet Urinal* (1975). Three further collections have appeared since Dransfield's death, including his *Collected Poems* (1987), edited by Rodney Hall, who as poetry editor of the Australian newspaper had been among the first to publish Dransfield's work. Dransfield remains a figure of intense critical interest among modern Australian poets.

Pas de deux for lovers

Morning ought not
to be complex.
The sun is a seed
cast at dawn into the long
furrow of history.

To wake
and go
would be so simple.

Yet

how the
first light
makes gold her hair

upon my arm.
How then
shall I leave,
and where away to go. Day
is so deep already with involvement.

Going away

shoes, ties, handkerchiefs, odd details to remember
at such a moment. Leaving for the last time
on the long voyage into solitude.

The past floods round, and there is no escaping
memories, big as icebergs part-submerged
but floating into horrid consciousness.

The past, the future, they are one, the present
an agony of huge apostasizing
of all one's life till now. Packing to go,
taking love's seasons in a dusty suitcase
out through the sky and through a hundred days
which will be purgatory intensified.

What will be left after another love
has grown and gone and faded into diaries
filled with the glad oblivion removing
sequences from realities and from
illusionary roles we call existence?

Platform 16, Central Station

Disembodied. This is not I. Yet
to be somehow a part of this. Gray
smoke is all the air, a tin awning the sky,
the ground concrete. Trains shunt by
noisily, but there is no sound. That left
an hour ago, tomorrow it may be in Brisbane,
far north of these delusive afternoons.
Here love is like the east wind, the ocean wind
coming every second month, when it comes
and has sung and gone away it will seem unreal.
So with life. Coming and going, rarely
to destinations we anticipated.
Strangers drift by, gulls in railway uniform
passing to other shores of night than this.
A transitory world, trains and people both,
the ugly landscape our memorial;
platform 16, Central Station.

July poem

The tastes and colours are as dust
her kisses ashes in my mouth
night and another morning pass,
another year, my life, and she
loves but will never understand.

Wine travel and oblivion
the circle of the mocking sun
and the inconstant nightingale
sing and betray me with their song
pain is their shadow and my veil.

The months of flower and falling rain
move as in dream it is unreal
a pageant and a funeral
to mark these anniversaries
of love's fruition and its fall.

Who treads the prophet's way of truth
takes for his solace solitude
eternities of barren thought
a book of words and the world's end
the only threshold he may cross.

How in the seasons of despair
the wind is sour upon my lips
the tempters ply their trade in souls
and men of vision draw their nets
empty from the human sea.

What the mind hears

As the sea
is contained in a cowrie shell
so inside the eyelid
a picture
within the ear a song
a rhyme under the tongue
or in cupped hands a shape a surface.
The conception always just beyond touching
out of reach
to reach it is creativity
to only feel its presence is frustration;
What the mind hears
when it will not give utterance—
Art itself but how to make it real?

JAMIE GRANT

b. 1949

Born James Beresford Grant in Melbourne in 1949, Jamie Grant attended Geelong Grammar School, and subsequently La Trobe University, where he studied English. After graduating he worked briefly in advertising as a copywriter, before becoming a sales representative for the academic publisher Cambridge University Press. Grant moved to Sydney in 1984, where he worked as a bookseller and later as a freelance journalist and reviewer. He is married to a literary agent, Margaret Connolly.

Grant began publishing poetry in Australian literary journals in the early 1970s. His first poetry collection was a joint publication with Graeme Kinross-Smith, *Turn Left at Any Time With Care* (1975). He has since published six further volumes of poetry, including a *Selected Poems* (2001). Associated with the more conservative stream of contemporary Australian poets such as Les Murray and Robert Gray, in the late 1980s and early 1990s Grant gained a reputation for his book reviews, which tended to be highly critical of the 'Generation of '68' poets among others. His poems have been distinguished by their use of narrative, and increasingly, by the use of rhymed verse. His work has appeared in a number of literary magazines, most frequently in *Quadrant*. Grant was editor of the anthology *100 Australian Poems You Need to Know* (2008).

The Rime of the Ancient Cricketer

Three times the batsman swung and missed;
the third ball struck his knee:
he is an Ancient Cricketer,
and he stoppeth one of three.

A First View of Cricket

What use is this ritual, held
on a circular meadow
with men arranged in clusters, some
almost out of earshot? They
all wear cream flannel trousers:
perhaps they're hospital
orderlies, or homosexuals.

A group of them lie on the grass,
and one is scribbling notes
on sheets of green paper. Another
climbs to his feet, then stoops
down beneath the railings — his brow
inscribed with innocent hope
reminds me of our priests, inviting

God's assistance with the harvest.
He cradles a wooden object
in his arms, that's a sculpted
delicate wedge shape which seems
to me quite useless as a tool.
Blue laminex sky, where clouds
unreel like bolts of flannel.

Air so still the noises made
by birds echo in a vacant
corridor. Now, that man
attempts to dig a furrow
with his unsuitable implement —
someone rushes at him
and swings both arms like the arms

of a metronome. And he leaves the trench
unfinished: when he reaches
the place he set out from, his
expression is utterly changed,
the face of a man returned
from a long and serious journey,
returned to a punitive silence.

A Short Analysis of the Creative Act

Parked outside a chartered accountant's
you try to write verse in the car.
Recollected in tranquillity, emotion
resists all definition.
Grocery-carrying wives stride past.
A pensioner walks onto the road

and is flattened by a tram.
You reach for your thesaurus.

Mon Pere Est Mort

For an oral exam, when aged thirteen,
my father was asked questions in French
by a visiting professor in trench-coat
and gold-rimmed spectacles, who was lean

with the thin, pursed lips of an enemy
interrogator. He pressed my father
to say what his father's *métier*
was — an awkward question, for how many

schoolboys know the French for ‘Real Estate
Agent’? Adopting a tragic expression,
my father just replied ‘*Mon père est mort.*’

The professor blushed to commiserate;
when the results of the examination
were known, my father had the highest score.

Sisyphus at the Supermarket

The cleaning products and cereals,
confections and cans of fruit juices,
the cheeses and light-globes and aerials
and pans which have all kinds of uses

all shine on the shelves in an order
cunningly programmed to tempt
the housewife, the landlord and boarder
who shuffles in looking unkempt,

so the children are bribed with lollies,
the checkout receipts are unfurled,
and then we descend with our trolleys
to a dimly-lit underworld

where ducts from the airconditioners
are roaring like dinosaurs.
Families and old-age pensioners
load over-stuffed bags into cars

and drive away without thinking
of the lost soul who is left behind
to spend his long daytime linking
the emptied trolleys into lines

until they have formed a stiff-wheeled
hollow-shelled steel centipede
which he must push up the ramp. In a field,
plodding at similar speed,

a ploughhorse would trudge like this man
with his doleful equine face,
condemned to an unending span,
always uphill at one pace,

and each time he reaches the brightness
at the top of the ramp's hairpin bend
he cannot feel any lightness
as more silver trolleys descend

like water drops which are leaking
from a crack in the side of a dam.
And their uncoiled wheels keep creaking
like piteous cries of the damned,

so that he may as well be pushing
a stone up that slope with his nose.

A faulty light-tube is flashing
spasmodic as someone's death-throes.

The Surrealist Poem

My daughter composed her first surrealist poem
when I was unknotting her hair with a comb,
and had paused, exasperated by the tangle,
to observe: 'Your hair is like a jungle.'
'Your hair is like an icecream parlour, Dad,'
was her instant reply; she proceeded to add:
'Jock's hair is like a pirate ship, and Emily's
hair is like a hospital.' 'And Mummy's?'
I prompted. 'Would it be a telephone, or a fairy?'
'No!' The young poet concluded, 'Hers is like a library.'

Relativity

Here is a question where measurement fails,
though not quantum theory, maybe —
a crying baby weighs more than a sleeping baby,
yet it doesn't show on the scales.

MARTIN HARRISON

b. 1949

A poet and critic, Martin Harrison lives in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales. He teaches poetry and poetics at University of Technology, Sydney. The recipient of numerous Australia Council Fellowships (including residencies in Italy and the USA), his most recent collection *Summer* was shortlisted for the 2002 New South Wales Premier's Award for Poetry and won the 2002-3 Wesley Michel Wright Award. A collection of essays on writing, contemporary criticism and issues in recent Australian poetry, *Who Wants To Create Australia?* is due in 2004.

Harrison's poetry deals in moments, accesses and charts the spaces between seeing and knowing, hearing and understanding, feeling and experiencing, at each moment developing a complex but accessible engagement with the nature of perception and the intricacies and interstices language creates. Grounded in landscape, Harrison's poetry often develops through narrative or direct commentary on either poetry or politics into a close examination of how the speaker comes to understand the world, or perhaps more exactly, how the speaker comes to the world, not simply how he experiences land, poetry and politics, but how perception alters those experiences (perhaps, those 'facts'), and drives a far-reaching and finely tuned consciousness back upon itself, its own mechanisms, allowing a sense of the speaker to evolve as integrated within the world's flux and flow. It is often through this recognition (and it is within Harrison's poems that cognition is seen to begin again and deepen) that the speaker gains access to a deeper experience of being and the world, of the integration of the two and such integration's inverse, the spaces of separation that determine and delimit:

*You'll see none of this clearly till later.
(There was your own looking, walking to account for.)
The pigeons, the horse, the crickets, the swamp-gums were just there,*

*scarcely visible,
secretly communicative in
every direction like a place where paths, meandering, at last meet.*
(‘Late Western Thought’, from *Summer*)

Harrison's lines often seem to follow the meandering trajectory of this last line. It's difficult to interrupt Harrison's speakers, to draw out a simple and single quote, as each line comes to form a path in a nexus of paths. Harrison's poetry is remarkable for the wholeness of its thought and expression, as though each line presented a neural pathway of a single system of thought, balanced and focused, able with ease and at times deliciously fecund relation to the world, to cast off the shadows of both world and language, the negativity that inhabits each, and give it as an almost physical presence.

While closely attuned to the fluidity of temporality and perception, memory is a constant concern in Harrison's work, and traces a backbone to an otherwise shimmering world of creation in process and perception. Narratives from errant travelers or drawn from family history, lend a very human edge to a poetry often closely engaged with the difficult terrain of phenomenology and perception.

Harrison's keen use of narratives, keeps his poetry from drifting too far into the abstract or conceptual, from becoming too much about language at the cost of experience. Take for example, the movement from narrative to the conception of narrative, from nostalgia to a dissection of nostalgia, from memory to cognition, where each point of departure cleanly defines and is defined by its point of return:

*In my mid-teens,
my father, bored with his business,*

*used to take me driving with him on his
rounds across the north of England: he was
drumming up trade for his imported*

*Spanish wines – Alellas, rich Riojas, and my
still favourite green ones, vino verde or
verdelho. In the glove compartment, there*

*were the poets he'd always liked – Eliot, bitter
Larkin and the Welshmen, Vernon Scannel
and Thomas (R.S.). He took them out at*

*roadside stops. Back home at night, he jotted screeds
of 'nature poetry.' He called it doing the accounts.
Sincerely, he hoped I'd do more, with more success:*

*but "study money, not poetry" was his long-lived, bleak
advice. In his 80s now, his steady observation:
"I've given up making sense of things. Work only*

*for yourself." A palimpsest is what's scraped away:
a scraping which reveals a trace, a 'beneath' that's covered
over with new scrawl. Are memories like that trace?*

*It could be so, but they are more like waves, a
patterning of dots, invasive, darting, spacious.
Like dominoes, they fit together, fall apart. Like*

stories, too, you have to think them out, make them work.
(*'Letter from America', in Summer*)

This notion of work runs throughout Harrison's poetry. There is a sense that each poem is a hard-won moment of perception even while offering to the reader an enviable translucence, a clear vision of the world in its contingency and temporal flux. At the heart of these profound and ever-meticulously crafted poems, this long meditation into the mechanics of conception and perception, is the warmth and flesh of the complexity of life and being plainly spoken.

© Michael Brennan

Breakfast

As early as this - it's just after dawn - you're overwhelmed by the glimmering of things. The grasses, the rocks, the bluff and its shelves, inland hakeas, casuarinas, some sort of mountain ash, I'm not sure which. Then the blue-veined, opalescent smear of lake which fills up the middle ground, a long expanse of daybreak light on water. Down there, squalls of wind pockmark it, as if it's been scattered with grit. Up here it's completely windless, while, far away through the air's greyness, the opposite side's wide blond plain starts coming clear - it's a shore of unfenced grazing country now dotted with trees.

Dark cover which starts half way up those slopes turns out to be just more trees, thicker, more dense. If this side's anything to go by, mainly storm-battered yellow box and hakeas. Above them, along the ridge's tops a band of white glow takes the northerly skyline. Of course, distance across water can easily fool: those trees are fifteen kilometres away.

...Something close to that.

The sky gets paler and paler.

Air's already dry, resonant with the months of drought we've been having. Overhead, two streaked vapour trails broaden into hastily brushed scumble - gigantic scribble marks crazily laddered across vacancy. It's as if someone's leant them there, knowing they'd make an optical illusion, puzzling to work out. They can't be Sydney with its curfew. ("Melbourne to Darwin, Melbourne to Singapore," I'm thinking.) And over here: a steep drop down to a fishing-jetty where the campsites are wrongly



A crow sheers away in the trees beneath this slope. It knows its *caw-caw*'s have been heard a thousand times before. So common I instantly forget it. I'm not trying to fix the two crimson rosellas, either, which have been rough-housing inside a gangly, smashed tree directly to the left. Their presence easily slips beneath awareness, too. They've quietened for a moment into typical chitter-chatter of high pitched half-squealing. The sound's "sweet": glistening like a stem of blood-red berries.



The entire memory of waking, a quarter of an hour ago, might also be handed back to forgetfulness, incurring no loss. Together with its other pristine sight: the long-limbed grey kangaroo stretched out on the grass with her two young. (It's a while before I see them). The dry white grass where they're lying is beaten down, as if this is a regular sleeping-place. The mother's reclining on her flanks, the joeys are hunched over grazing. When they see me they don't panic but get up slowly. They're eyeing me. Very carefully. Ignoring me, as if they know the speed with which they can vanish into air. Right there, a "vanishing act" is exactly what they do. I look out across a turquoise braid of water for a few seconds. When I look

back they've not been fooled. Quiet as noiseless wind, they've left

◇

Too easy to say that could be the day's excitement.

And the results of dawn twilight's scattered happenings?

Why fix them unless there's some pressure, some disturbance?

Isn't it enough just to be a hunter of images, a hunter of things?

Is it the scale of this water which dislocates?

Years after it's been put here, it never quite fits.

Will it never accommodate this double valley's contours?

Are its pearl-blue acreages shore-nibbled, spread-eagled?

◇

Hard, then, not to fit in what's over there on the left, two or three kilometres away. I knew it was there. Of course. But it shifts the drama of the moment like a sudden cut in a movie. Every motive, every gesture has to be re-examined. It's the rear view of the half-exposed dam wall and, past it, a spur jutting out into the lake: a drowned quarry abstractly chopped out from what's left of a hillside. A sliced half of a hill, cut apart as if by a sea.

So now it looks like an enormous mass of water is bearing down on the rock face: every ripple carries weight, every windrow blusters towards it. The sense it gives (the half-thought-out link) is water piling up before an island's vertical cliffs. The whole movement pressures an immense oceanic space, but then of course there's the wall of the dam, saying: No, this is not an island. We're far over the Dividing Range. This is inland, not island.

The truth is: the lake's being human, humanly made, offers the viewer a hugeness not that different from transcendence. It dwarfs any thought of it. Only a dream-fragment can be kept in mind. Floods roar down gulleys like a front of wild horses. Natural lakes are (bad rhyme) the sky's eyes. Was I dreaming that? When? (A line close to one already in another poem might be: *This lake's wind-blackened surface now winks back.* Or: *It is and always was a decision, and could be error*). Yet the effect's deliberate, not casual or dreamlike. It's light on water. It's like a balance, like an equipoise. And then, no, it's not. A rippling lake surface, the water can't conceive that it's here or that I'm looking at it or that it has any connection with desertification, salinity, river silts. For all that, it has to be said that reality doesn't arrive as a lake. It arrives as an angel knocking on the door, pointing out how many things make up a world. Waking up, what it pointed to was this drowned valley, the yellow-box, the ash, the still night-covered hill, the weight of wind and water. The weight of design and engineering. What it lit up was a complex moment in perception where to conceive a dam's bearing towards human

nature requires the same skills as the resolution of any ethically knife-edge, historically many-sided issue. In our time, for example, some Israel, some country in the Middle East. It's exactly at the point when I realise how each drop of water, hanging in these hills, is gathering to fruition that I realise, too, how far the night's behind me and I'm fully awake.

January

for Robert Adamson

A blue smear bulges over the ridge;
there's the counterpoint as well
of shine on white-hot duco
glimpsed on the ute

parked outside on the driveway. It
blinds its surrounds with a surfboard
beach-effect. It's as ominous
as the *Marie Celeste*—it looks

lonely, isolated parked there,
brilliant in tinfoil sharpness
of afternoon light. If this were Ireland,
it would explode. No-one would go near it.

Everywhere, drained objects.
A makeshift look—the spaces round things,
thirsty, blasted. Lizards skitter
on pavers. Up the shed, a blue-tongue

clunks in a pile of old iron; there's even been
a hint of bushfire smoke, hard
to detect at first. Almost a pool's chlorine smell.
Again, this afternoon, a storm's on its way:

that cloud-line's now etched with thunderheads,
white-tinted like cottonwool, as it builds
up further into a trident-shape,
a cobra-headed plume, a ledge

where the lightning already flickers,
a streak of it fluttering down
quick as a tumbler-pigeon dropping
behind trees. I watch it—

forget about it—still miles away.
A line of brightness picks things out,
bouncing back from the ground
where the world of many-sized ants—

ones with cream dots,
bull-ants, swarming small black ants
ready to attack if you dislodge their hard,
clay holes—goes on like traffic

at a city-intersection: everything passing,
crossing over, moving in relation
to its own purposes. It could be one of those
stunt-movies from the 30s

where a streetscape filmed
from a skyscraper gets speeded up—
nothing crashes, everything fits—
so that time becomes fluid, allowing this

fixated, ground-based activity
of lizard and ant
to operate: impossible to breathe
if you thought this more than once a day.

Most violence is mundane, it seems.
Out here, on a blaster of a day like this,
I just survive. So that to be able to say if
the ants expect a Yangtse

or what is the exact point
at which that oncoming ultramarine cloud
turns into translucent glare
shattering its excess

of green light into a pre-storm's
voiceless, windless moment
of quickening darkness
where the birds go silent—

I know it's time to pack up
when the plastic sheet, weighted down
over the sand-pile, flickers
like a lion, couched in grass, raising its head—

is to put a marker
nowhere
on a border which can't be found, which
just occurs and has

already happened. Yet each instant
that border is
defended to the death like an eye-blink
fights annihilation. It's just the moment's

particularity which makes
this much attachment
sow dragon's teeth in earth and which (like a sky)
makes even transparency a shadow.

That's what happened five minutes ago.

A clear, overhead blue was microwaving
the garden plants to mash
making them collapse in invisible fire.

Ode in April

Moments of connection,
of intimate attention to the nooks and crevices
of how mind and body fit together,
of the melting and blending of imaginary and actual flesh,
of sensation, impulse and dreaming all caught in the same mode,
of broadness and the long sweep of emotion
out into the air
in a gasp

of true surprised pleasure
plus some level of bemusement at what is happening
while your mind acts automatically
in supposing vistas, inclines, plains stretching towards lakes,
both real ones and instant ghosts of wideness, spaciousness, outstretch,
and every nerve achieves a precise quantum
of intensity's
needle points

are moments when events
happen for themselves thoughtlessly, intuitively, with
that in-the-mind, out-of-the-mind energy
of kicking a ball, wheeling a trolley, greeting someone on the street,
or of touching, holding, kissing, playing with nipple or ear,
getting closer in love: all and any actions
which instantly
out of the

blue are just now what you
feel like doing. Sure, they're impelled differently when they
are everyday behaviour on the street
from when they're the urge for love-making, drawn from deepest wells:
but both are instinctive behaving and, if free, are sincere-
ly part of the repertoire of what's best in
human nature, what
makes it (so

to speak) "tick" effortless-
ly without stressing the pursuit of a shared well-being
which is also requisite in well-run
worlds where the natural movement is towards what's fine, towards the light.
So when thinking that the fridge needs re-stacking, that it gets so
quickly messed up, or, seconds later, that the
sprinkler should be turned
on the tired-

looking mock-orange by
the gate or that the eaves need repainting (some boards broken,)

these thoughts (gliding black swans on shining water)
are like some quick desire for you, your body and what together
we can do by way of love and energy, pulsing, throbbing
with it. More than just “sex in everything”
this wholeness which comes
from what con-

nects is the moment's
life, its refused dark. Each individual breathes this daylight
of the self's own breathing. Each place is like
a glance of brightness. Someone sees it, someone touches that moment.
And war? War's for sellers of war, breeding apology
for the way each moment's bombed, bruised, torn apart
while the body shrieks
out its pain

as it's dismembered, cut
to shreds by machine-guns, or carved into body parts
by mortars which turn people into flesh:
mangle of bleeding viscera, torsos chopped out, headless remnants
scattered among those still conscious who grope amongst the blood
like rocks exposed in surf, or like blinded ones
struggling in a marsh
which drowns them.

On a bridge at Nasa-
riyah, a group of women and children caught in crossfire,
cars burning (one with a corpse inside it
which, the report says, gave off “a hissing sound”), are pulled aside on
the road: these blanketed hummocks are the firefight's rubbish.
Later, after a truck carrying soldiers
suffers a direct hit,
one Marine

carries a “huge chunk of flesh,”
a friend's remains so maimed he could not be identified.
Consciousness is obliterated in
a wall of fire and blood. No-one, alive and well, can imagine it.
No-one who loves another forgives what's let loose here. Whether
gas-haze strewing people to the ground or this
bridge's dreamlike scene
of death and

disintegration, mind
and body fight off the day-lit, subconscious nightmare. It
skews seeing like an hallucinogen:
now a toddler, moaning, proffers a bandaged twig which was his hand, while
the next image shows a young woman, seemingly, bleeding to
death under a sheet. These close-ups wither you.
Anger, prayer, aren't
sufficient:

we dream of a future
where waging war's illegal, where there are means to linger
by that woman's, that child's bed. Connections
span the gap. I ask you: re-live an Easter car-crash, a street fight:
how much must heal, knit, grow back, like wilderness after fire.
But those bland faces (Bush, Blair, Howard) on our
television screens?
They blaze truth.

Summer

The hotel's blue pool has little shipwrecks on it:
last night's mosquitoes, a bug or two, a lollipop stick.
It has coolness, too, greyness and limpidity,
together with the slight echo of pre-traffic moments
shimmering across its transparency, its daybreak light.

Blue tiles, chlorine smell, a filtration hum,
someone's caulked this ad-world image of a dream
for (it says) 'hotel guests only,' then painted it,
cleaned out the pumps, filled it, set it going.
It's a rooftop machine to plunge into, loving its feel.

So, exhausted travellers sky-dive in its clearness.
Water (they think) cares for them as it lets them through.
Someone jumping in won't worry how much turbulence
whips up corrugated peaks, valleys slopping
into hills, sprayed-out grunge, glistening parabolas.

Stilled, its mirror surface is no more than mirror deep.
A lap-swimmer cuts through it shaping a wake
before he turns, twisting from underwater, like a shark.
Right now, unused, it reflects a city's post-dawn sounds,
unknown bird-whistles and (familiar, this) that hour-long coolness

of slightly lifted pollution which is a breath of heaven
before the heat. Someone's waking up in the building
opposite—a Thai family on a balcony who haven't slept.
They've been outside all night among the knick-knacks there,
a cheaply tacked-up electric bulb in the kitchen

left on:—a washing-line, clamped from the wall
to a bamboo pole on the balcony, sags under a confetti
of shorts and T-shirts. Are they rich or poor
to live in low high-rise in the tourist zone? This might be
wealth if you've moved from an up-country village,

laced through with smelly waterways, green
luxuriant foliage and the spike of a golden shrine
which Americans, heiffer-garlanded with cameras,
walk through. Here, too, there's a wealth of angles:
that family's exposed to any bastard foreigner

who pushes out from the passageway's air-con
onto this humid, half-warm, half-cool platform
where, terraced ten floors above the carpark,
this wind-free, smooth lozenge of water
has been arranged behind concrete tubs in a fake garden-

effect, four square metres of grey-green pelouse,
and six white plastic recliners articulating the
full stretch of imaginary bodies, sipping
martinis through straws. Those chairs—
the thought's a shock rising over clear, bare seas—

are really signs of death, sculptures signalling 'absence of body';
while quiet water, I suddenly remember, is stagnancy and grief.
(It's water with a texture which seems to look right past you.)
There's always this desire simply to stop. But I drag
one of the chairs over the concrete to make somewhere

to sit, so I can take my runners off. Everyone wears
such sporty clothes, when travelling: Nike, Adidas,
waist-pouches, sweatshirts with Penguins on them
like we're overseas salesmen for a New York gym:
glucose drinks, cholesterol, sparkling mineral water

are the unconscious of its regulation code. More seriously,
I'm thinking what is it lines up a world-famous shot?
So much which, floating, fills up time is already visualised.
What is the accident which drags you to the shore?
What's the moment, focussed not on that family,

but the one which flashes through its web of neurones,
signifying the merest fact of being here, snapped
in this age of debris, smoke and fire? A glittering,
electronic dust dissolves, mind-wise, in a constant
background hum, indicative as a lawn's pink flamingo:

only the dead, their remembered messengers, walk in and out of it,
like figures drifting, ghostlike, on a riverbank.
No Odysseus goes there now with his flasks of blood.
This split second—this jet-lagged moment—fixes my mind on home:
a humane life that's rootless, mindless as summer is.

Letter from America

Two white men are arguing about the earth mover:
how to get it down from the truck
parked outside the rail station. It's too humid,
they shouldn't be outside. Stocky, they look like they spend their lives

working with machines—their day-lives, which is to say—working
with the contraptions which underpin
American life, these earthbound flying-
ants, these nooks and crannies of green, rich complexity:

green, rich complexity, though, is an abstract phrase
for something which denies particularity
in this local cybernetic mode of lakes
and highways, dense woods and rusted factories,

invisible and visible wealth careering
down tollways, where labour's become
a non-stop office behaviour, a commuting
between islands of coolness, synthesised voices and a pace

a village blacksmith could deal with, all of it on line.
Interiors are enamelled, clean,
decked with white and gold-trimmed lamps. Future time
is already here, extracted from pockets of memory loss

via thresholds and samples, making it impossible to fall
beneath a level still to be invented
or imagined differently: *green, rich*
complexity occurring if we go forward without things.

Trailer parks will eat up the earth one day, but not here.
Dipped in fire, they'll be tidied away
whether by local ordinance or, as here,
by simply ignoring those lives 'of quiet desperation [1]'—

that 19th Century American's phrase—which were viewed
from a hollow of mirror-like, Ice Age pond
not far from where I'm now: yet those two guys
have worked it out, in green sun-vizors and white T-shirts,

inching the earth-mover down to the carpark's gritty asphalt.
I've the sense nothing touches the ground,
not even this behemoth with its caterpillared
wheels, yellow perspex-glassed cab and proboscis

with half crab-claw, half shovel-prong. Perhaps they mean
to excavate a flyover or an

isthmus with it, thereby adding to the communication
load which their rich, death-seeking neighbours, trapped in this time,

are burdened by. On their highways they drive right through it,
preferring data to be piped to im-
maculate white clapboard village houses
with neo-classical porches where frayed Stars and Stripes

hang listlessly behind trim lawns. Multi-channel television
becomes both umbrella and window,
carelessly glimpsing a diamante storm:
somewhere in there, the necklaces of night-time, red-light, unsewered

tropical towns sprawl under purple sunset-pollution haze,
together with the verdigris mudflats of
coastal floating villages and (like an eyebrow)
that pale, elegant half-desert landscape I'm familiar with:

maroons, silvers, browns, splashes of red-flowering gums haunt it,
and haunt me. But these things don't matter
viewed from here. This is the age
of division, of rhizomatic loss, of litter ground down in a unit

custom-built with its push-button motor. May it never
break down! May it always churn and chur
from that hole in the gleaming sink! May the
Nasdaq keep rising on the basis of chewed-up islands

with their jets flying in for cocktail hour! Their sharp-nosed flight
mimics the ibis landing in a wetland. Parked, waiting for the train,
I'm in automatic stasis, half-caught
in half-thought: a balance between highrise white as a pelican feather and a
yacht-sail

crumbling in a contrary breeze. They're just tokens.
Smears in paintings, memories of photos
where a moment ripples like wind in tall grass behind a barn.
This light catches it, makes it local, freezes it in corrugated iron.

...[1] "...lives 'of quiet desperation'." The phrase is Henry Thoreau's in *Walden*.

Late Western Thought

There were topknot pigeons
whirring up
from the edges of the driveway—

getting lift off with
their high-pitched wing beats,
like springs rattling in an old car.

So, you couldn't help but notice them.
You took them in
much the same way the piebald horse had started wandering over:

the horse was a fat-bellied shadow ambling through the stillness
where the light was turning.
Nearby, some thistles: the mare and the pony grazed in deep grass.

You'd see none of this clearly till later.
(There was your own looking, walking, to account for.)
The pigeons, the horse, the crickets, the swamp-gums were just there,

scarcely visible,
secretly communicative in
every direction like a place where paths, meandering, at last meet.

Sure, a bird had then cried out
as if the moment could go dark with an utter suddenness.
You'd remember that bird as (somewhere) a cuckoo-dove before rain.

(You'd remember it as a whoop, a shout, rather than a call.)
But you would, by then, be walking back down the driveway
oblivious to the clay-coloured light, the pale wisps of grass

and the heaped-up blemish of gravel
which marked some ants-nest, living or abandoned.
Later, you'd say you saw everything. It entered you.

Of course, it remains no more than a story.
About seeing and forgetting, its narrative is the root of compassion,
not least because, afterwards, you must still capture it at one go—

yes, in a single, sharp flame of light—

setting and slanting,
raking deep fire behind the trees (they're black silhouettes on the ridge),
invisibly burning you, invisibly burning itself.

Fine Rain at Night

Fine, very slow, persistent rain
with its undertalk of shimmerings and insect wings
has already got going, is already talking its half-heard voices
round the back of the house or here along the verandah.

It's drifting in arrow-heads through the side-door light.
Now it's playing its late modern ensemble of pings and drum-beats.
It should be recorded, treated, made into a model
of world music—a long-sought harmony between things and minds.

It's played by no-one, designed nowhere, part of the great limit
on sciences, global structure, maths: it defies motive,
it has function. It suggests how most events are random.
Being mere rain it keeps battering on gutters, down drain-pipes.

Being invisible it saunters out of the darkness like an animal,
padding up before you've seen it. Bright, noisy—definitely
a body fanning out across the blackness, sliding through branches—
but more like a face whose expression you'd like to read, and know well:

what you notice is Amazon rivers, lakes, shore-lines, swamps.
That's how your mind's flooded with it, adapting to its miniatures,
which free-fall on verandah-post, wooden steps. It crowds night-space.
Not yet mapped, the gaps in it are like a clear night's stars.

A Breath of Wind on a Summer Night

A river of blackness curls over
a stone. Just like that old woman said,
talking in her back kitchen at the station
a day's drive from Alice. You hear it
“like a breath of wind when you don't expect it.”
I'd met the oldest of the two children:
children of his own, he now ran the place.
The night before, his mother had talked on a bit:
how that early life, the people camped
round the house—it had all gone. The old woman
(it was her husband first took out the lease) was talking
about journeys she had made: she spoke as
if it was all yesterday. Years back, they'd gone north
to Chambers Pillar, with the first two children,
and they'd carved their initials on a rock there.
Never been back. I did the drive two days later,
took a photo after I found the stone—in that wide, red
country of fleeing ancestors, you could
still find it. Not the pillar. The stone she'd scribed.
It needed an afternoon to make their fence.

The mind's like a razor cutting through water.
All of this—lodged, logged—flashed out
(her voice, those chance words, the stones, the creek)
when I looked up this morning at the black snake
flowing on to the verandah, a flickering
half-caught back of the ear. I hadn't seen it.
A second later black water flowed on stones,
veering away in a quick, indifferent slide, then coiling,
pouring from a bush, dazzling like the
humid, glaring weather which had woken it:
a red-bellied black snake, zig-zag of light
now moving only a few feet off by a downpipe.
It swerves to avoid me as I move back.
It drains into a garden, hiding there for ever.
It appears (like a micro-second), then retreats,
lurking, buried in shadows, blank as wind
round a rock-face, melting into night.
I respect snakes, no longer kill them, fearing
the suddenness with which you meet them—
struggling under a lifted sheet of old, piled up tin,
or like now (out of glare, narrow lines in heat)
travelling up past the house from the creek's reed-beds.
In grass, they're like trains in mountains, seen from high up.
At night, they're fluent darkness, a river bend
flowing on the edge of a path. Put a step wrong,
it could kill you—for all snakes being deaf, sounds

don't make them get out of the way. This one waits,
hangs around, pretends it's gone; then like a
javelin, launches out from between two stones,
swiggling towards the back: its quick meanders
are like a necklace, taken off, and thrown down on a chair.
Now it's heading up to the orchard. They say you get a
sixth sense for them when they're around: that
may be right.

Other times I sit outside
in the cool of summer night's best hours, catching
the frog-sounds and the crickets, listening
to the night's wilderness, out there over the hills
where cloudy wetlands turn to metal grey. Mostly, as everyone does,
I watch the new stars' spaciousness: instant
flashes of thought, green rock-like memories.
A wind-breath, down the verandah, plays
its way through—a slight cool draft turning a corner.

You know what it is. It appears from nowhere.
It lures you. You must beat it off, take a brush to
the bushes, run up and down, drive it away.
It's just a thought. On that drive to Chambers,
the flat-topped hills (like mesas in the westerns)
swam forward on the skyline. Desert oaks danced out
along a water course. I was younger then: it'd interest
me less now. Yet like that woman on her breezeway's steps,
I sit outside enjoying the cool, remembering how she
talked of sleepless nights. How one time, sitting out,
she'd heard a snake—a brown—moving down the concrete,
aware of it like a breath, like a cool wind
on your skin. And she used that phrase—
that plain, deathless phrase—about the way a swirl
of wind tracks through the night, a breath of it
when you least expect it out of no place:
that breath, that presence, when you don't expect it.
It steps round you, then passes without thought.
Inanimate word or solid thing, deaf as rivers are.
If silence has a name, then this is it: an
arrow-headed stream trying to escape—
a whisper, a poison-dart, an ignored rope coil.

LAURIE DUGGAN

b. 1949

Laurie Duggan was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1949 and now lives in England. He has published numerous books of poems, the most recent being *The Passenger*, (UQP, 2006), *Let's Get Lost* (with Pam Brown and Ken Bolton, Sydney, Vagabond, 2005), *Compared to What: Selected Poems 1971-2003*, (Exeter, Shearsman, 2005), and *Mangroves* (UQP, 2003). Shearsman have also republished his 1987 documentary poem *The Ash Range* (2005). His poems and articles have appeared in many anthologies and in various journals in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and America. He has read at many venues including the Menzies Centre, King's College, London, December 2006; the Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry, April 2006; the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre at the University of Auckland, March 2006; the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, 1992; and on an Australia Council sponsored tour of the USA and Canada in 1987.

Duggan has worked over the years as a screenwriter, a newspaper art critic, a lecturer in Media, Art History and Cultural Studies at various institutions, an Honorary Research Advisor at the University of Queensland and a Writer/Scholar in Residence at Griffith University. He completed a doctorate in Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne in 1999 and UQP subsequently published his thesis, *Ghost Nation: Imagined Space and Australian Visual Culture, 1901-1939* (2001). He currently holds a Writer's Fellowship from Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Laurie Duggan is no populist. As he notes in one interview, he sees himself more part of a generation of '71 than of the generation of '68, placing more importance on the friendships and conversations with poets such as John Scott and Alan Wearne, and a shared love of Berrigan's Sonnets, which emerged around the Monash Readings of the late 60s and early 70s, than the "fifteen minutes of fame" associated with Tranter's groundbreaking anthology.

His work remains skeptical of the figure of the poet as much as the pretensions of the self, preferring a constant examination of the various textual and cultural streams of information forming the self, coupled with a strikingly precise eye for the images from which the physical world is built and recalled. Perhaps most vitally of all, Duggan's skepticism is grounded by its humour and readability, and by the musicality of his language and thought. It is conversational without being confessional, the speaking self often being more a gathering of texts and observed perceptions than anything that might be self-consciously lyrical or literary. Duggan notes that he is resigned to a small audience, saying, "I'll never be Charles Bukowski or Sylvia Plath . . . but then I wouldn't want to be. I don't like either of them very much. And I don't know which is the greater presumption: to expect people to find interest in the things you are interested in or to expect them to find interest in you. I'd opt for the former."

While Duggan's poetry incorporates numerous cultural references, creating sometime polyvalent as much as polyvocal texts, the ease and conversational tone, the ongoing uncertainties and doubt about the acts of writing and memory, as much as perception and experience, which seem to fuel much of the writing, keep the poetry from obscurity or any hint of slipping through irony to a reaffirmation of the

poet's role and its cultural importance. His writing is not marked by a self-conscious need to impress through literary acrobatics nor a desire to beguile an audience through the emoting of spiritual insights. Duggan's poetry is demanding and as such is pleasurable for the insights it offers into the matrix that forms and informs perception and the construction of its voice.

While not populist, Duggan's work has attracted a very loyal readership over the years, a readership that, following his recent return to poetry with *Mangroves* and *The Passenger*, is rapidly and rightfully expanding, leading several critics to note he is among Australia's foremost or major poets.

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The Mysteries

Everything happens at once.
We miss most of it.
The kettle boils over
and puts out the fire.

October 1980

A Literary Life

1

Listening to the Dandenong line trains
exploding detonators all day long,
hearing at one o'clock sharp
Blue Hills on the radio while eating
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
spices herbs & curry, & now
reading some of Pound's letters to
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
Sordello & thinking I have paid
a miserable dollar twenty-five:
such fare!, I consider at times
my life a curious & amusing thing;
a play of passion never ending,
to relish every babe left on my doorstep.

2

Listening to the Dandenong line trains,
Blue Hills on the radio while eating,
reading some of Pound's letters to
a miserable dollar twenty-five . . .
a play of passion never ending,
exploding detonators all day long;
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
such fare, I consider at times
to relish every babe left on my doorstep,
hearing at one o'clock sharp
spices herbs & curry, & now
Sordello, & thinking I have paid
my life: a curious & amusing thing.

3

Listening to the Dandenong line trains
to relish every babe left on my doorstep
exploding detonators all day long,
a play of passion never ending;
hearing at one o'clock sharp
(my life a curious & amusing thing)
Blue Hills on the radio while eating
such fare. I consider at times
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
a miserable dollar twenty-five,
spices herbs & curry, & now
Sordello & thinking I have paid,

reading some of Pound's letters to
Joyce; noticing my selected Browning lacking.

4

Listening to the Dandenong line trains,
spices herbs & curry, & now
such fare, I consider at times
exploding detonators all day long,
reading some of Pound's letters to
my life (a curious & amusing thing),
hearing at one o'clock sharp
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
a play of passion; never ending
Blue Hills on the radio, while eating
Sordello & thinking I have paid
to relish every babe left on my doorstep
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
a miserable dollar twenty-five.

Poets's Note: June 1971

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Pleasures of the Text

The editor of a magazine
who denied 'authorship' as
more than a function of print
sues a parodist for libel.

September 1984

from A Skater on the Sara River

trace marks in sand
bright weeds
the morning red
under rain
the 'Guy Fawkes' or 'Little River'
down on the flood season.
insects float above the Sara
light up in the air
orange on the far bank,
the directional sense of a caterpillar
on a trunk, shadow side
from the rain
everything specific.

a skater on the Sara River
hovers on a flat of granite.

March 1975

It might as well be spring and all

1

You can do nothing consistent.
Carnegie. Dying gums
from which 'a plate of teeth' &c.
Abandon here syntax and hope,
just be washed, with this grey linen
and keep your eye on the clock;
lamplight in this room has not yet
rendered the outside dark
or the blue glow of oil heat
sent out an aura.

2

Sharp light on serrated funnels,
the chatter of the ABC at breakfast
— why can't they be morose?
Then there's Bruce Ruxton, some fart
from the Club. But under this blue plate
Asia seems no monster;
metal frame of the window holding
a Hokusai jigsaw,
matching pencil strokes
on the bedspread.

3

The man in the neat dressing gown
has gone, his cat with him;
his rooms, painted white weeks ago
are empty, the back steps
camouflaged with leaves; only
the rooftop's population unchanged:
nodding mynas and the dart
of silvereyes among the figs.
The weather has carried off the inhabitant
and the colours of bricks are no longer
the same; rust behind the upper buds,
a lone antenna carrying nobody's image,
possums brawling on the back fence.

4

Basil clings to windows through which
there is no depth of focus
beyond a cream chimney, slanted
rooftop tanks, hanging leaves.
Worms work through soil
under damp twigs and bark chips.
Pigeons gather near the gutter

over small round pools of themselves.

5

Milky light in the hall
from a garden lamp; aspirin light
as the couple from upstairs argue
in the stairwell. Doors open,
shut, then night takes away traces.
Broad, simple outlines of fig leaves
have nothing to do with this, nor
current affairs radio: the world above water level
of milk cartons and goodbyes,
of shifting light on red brick.
And the books lose their phosphorescence,
become objects; a landscape is pieced together
from twisted articles of a language
which kids us it's older.

6

A dragonfly affixes itself, nose to the wall,
the long tail drooping; a black spider
attached to the ceiling, forms a ball;
red flattened features of a wasp, crushed
in a roll blind, lie on the windowsill.
The shower of gnats has passed; a few
stray bugs cling to the furniture, stick
to the matt of grease on the cupboard floor
where oil bottles sit; or fumble, feet upwards
amid breadcrumbs in a washbasin.

7

Sheets of tin bang in a night gust
blocks away, footsteps sound from the passage
at two, when mosquitoes descend
on the bedroom's tent. Then daylight:
everything defines itself, parodies of the normal;
light movement of branches, the gale spent,
the spread of grass on a corner of earth
mown flat, paths swept, the garbage taken away.
Things you left on the table are still there,
the plants grown an inch taller; the cool
lemons have not escaped from the refrigerator.
Out on the street a tram stops and an old man
in a purple suit and cowboy hat
climbs down and totes his airline bag
across an intersection through the dull heat.

8

The table turns on its side: a Matisse!
and flowers creep up the window
across a grey sky, pink curlicues;

a clothesline above the flats deflects
coming rain, as the west moves in.
Yellow patches of blossom grid the tree
a couple of backyards away,
vases stand at regular intervals
across an isometric plane;
the trellis cross-hatch — above this
plumbing just into space:
round ventilator shafts, corrugated tanks,
and an overflow pipe wobbles in a gust;
curves into a question mark.

January 1989

Adventures in Paradise

for John Forbes, John Scott, & Carl Harrison-Ford

Near the end of the thirty-first year of my life
I find myself a bundle of sweaty neurones
under an umbrella shade in the courtyard
of the old Sydney University Union building.
What do I reckon has got me here and how?
I make a start on this autobiography.

Firstly, being a baby in baby powder
listening to Haydn and being fed
by an implement I think was called a pusher.
My grandmother wouldn't let my mother
hold me up in the bath. Is this
psychology? I don't remember much else.

Photographs give a few important clues:
the pattern of my father's cardigan
when he stood holding me up on the gate
at Beaconsfield Parade, South Melbourne.
I must have been looking out straight
across the road to Port Phillip Bay.

Then I'm sitting in a fruit box in the yard
with a dog called Sandy whose bones
I used to share. The place was a guest house
owned by my grandmother. I talked before
I could walk. Crawled up the stairs.
A man called Len Lovell fell off the roof.

The famous jazz musician Johnny Sangster
was a bohemian who lived in a bungalow
out the back. Upstairs there was a gangster
– incognito – who later got shot on the pier
in broad daylight. His real name was Freddy
Harrison. He held me at the breakfast table.

A lady threw lollies into the yard from the flat
next door. In a photograph we had cracked lino
on the dining room table and floor
and a Metters Early Kooka. My grandmother
had the room with the balcony upstairs.
Mussel and seaweed smells came from the shore.
My parents moved to Clayton when I was four
(this sounds like a line out of twelve-bar blues).
Every few months a man would come in a truck
and give me a few shillings for the empty

booze bottles which Dad stacked behind the garage.
Grandpa got caught on the dunny by the dunnyman.

When we got there the street was all mud
deep enough to swallow a baby, too deep
for cars. But we didn't have a car anyway
until Dad bought a 1957 Holden, but then
they'd almost made the road and all the market
gardens had all gone and I was at school.

There was a bakery near the station and one day
when Dad was sheltering from the rain
on the way back from work, a kid inside
called him a sour faced old bastard.
It got pulled down, became a wedding
reception room, then a hairdressing salon.

The doctor lived on the main street until
he moved around the corner. He thought I was smart.
My grandmother didn't like Picasso – for her
the sole representative of “Modern Art”. I wanted
to be a veterinary surgeon and fix up animals
and live on a farm like my uncle and aunt.

I went to Clayton South Primary School;
half the yard was covered in pine trees,
the other half was open for football and cricket.
The bodgies used to build houses out of
pine needles and go down there to smoke.
The milk got rancid in the morning sun.

On holidays I went with Mum and Dad
to Bairnsdale on the “Gippslander” and caught
a bus up the Omeo highway. My uncle
and cousin drove up the back paddocks
in a 1928 Chev to fix the fences. Sometimes
we camped in a tent on the river bank.

A friend of my father's I used to call Uncle Pat
lived around Footscray and worked in the abattoirs.
He was thin from being in a concentration
camp. I caught a tram to the meatworks
and a man cut out a sheep's eye and stuck it
on a post. “That's to see you don't get in trouble, Son.”

Another uncle worked in a recording studio
and my aunt had a program on the radio.
They got me to say a few things “over the air”
and gave me a free ticket to the Tarax Happy Show.
I was in a play in kindergarten in a chorus
of policemen and solo as a kangaroo.

Mum read me Shakespeare's sonnets and Milton
before I could talk. I liked them
but I didn't like the poetry much at school.
I had to learn off something by John Masefield
about the sea that he wanted to sail a ship on,
heavily stressed. I thought all poets old and bald.

My fifth grade teacher thought the two best books
were the Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress
but I was more interested in the dinosaur
and fighter aircraft of the second world war.
I had a great uncle who copied out passages
from Tennyson on greeting cards in tiny writing.

Apart from that I didn't do very much.
I learned to ride a bike and went to high school
and got 27 for arithmetic in the second form.
I think I still wanted to be a Vet., though
cartography came next. I was in the Boy Scouts
and got wet sleeping under a picnic table.

I burst a blood vessel below the brain
and spent two months in the Alfred Hospital
reading the complete works of Ian Fleming
which I liked because he could make golf
interesting. Then I read Emile Zola
and started writing D.H. Lawrence imitations

in which young men full of spirit flung
themselves down on the earth and felt it breathe
and everything seemed complete. I wanted
to be a rock star, then a painter,
then a novelist, but I ended up writing poems
late in 1966, misunderstanding T.S. Eliot.

Next year I got into trouble for a satire
about Dame Zara Holt in the school magazine
that came out the week the Prime Minister
swam out to sea with his snorkel and wasn't seen
again. Australia was all the way with L.B.J.
and the girl I loved loved someone in the Labor Club.

I raged at Monash in check pants and a black
roll neck jumper. This was the age of "progressive
rock". Someone got into trouble for staging
a mock crucifixion outside the Union Caf.
The vice-chancellor sputtered about the disinterested
pursuit of knowledge. I stopped copying Keats

and started to copy William Carlos Williams:

the absurd sonnet turned into the stick poem.
Lots of grown up poets visited the university
and read to the Lit. Club, all pissed on flagon sherry.
Chris Wallace-Crabbe competed with billiards
near the billiard room and the billiards won.

Some of the other poetry was more fun,
like Robert King dancing to bongo drums
and ripping his shirt off, or when B.A. Breen
read concrete poems with repeated words and when
an old academic asked him his definition of verse
Rob Smyth chanted POETRY POETRY POETRY.

There were marbles under police horses' hooves
on the fourth of July, and Colin and Margaret
stared at candle flames while Iron Butterfly
played "In-a-gadda-da-vida" and the doors
of perception opened wide. A weight ounce cost
twenty dollars. The "underground" lived in Carlton.

Sometimes we'd drive in with boots of lager
to La Mama to hear some situationist verse.
I wrote a Dransfield parody: Acid Fuck Raga,
and got told off by Geoff Egglestone
for not taking his work seriously. It was bad
but the Melbourne Uni. poets were worse,

writing about martyrdom in Parkville
on mornings before lectures with the shakes;
imagining themselves as William Blakes.
Not long after this the combination of dope
and footnotes in the work of Alexander Pope
convinced me the era of the Stoooge Effect had begun.

It was the dawning of the age of Aquarius.
I visited Sydney and wanted to stay there;
went to the Canberra Arts Festival with
a headband, two scarves, long hair, three sets
of beads and an army jacket and read to an audience
for the first time without going blind with fear.

Next year I moved to Sydney and a room
upstairs in Crown St., Surry Hills
with Pam Brown, poet, and an American groupie
with a waterbed and the bass player
from Led Zeppelin. Albie Thoms was shooting
funny movies about light from the front window.

Labor came into power. I missed the ballot box
and took a trip on a piece of blotting paper
thinking the party lights on trees in a Petersham park

had something to do with the advent of Socialism.
The blue V.W. spluttered through Glebe
bringing the pages of Zap Comix to life:

The me decade had begun. The age of subsidies,
safari suits, sonnet sequences, and the death of art.
The houses in the Glebe estate got repainted,
rents went up, people were psychoanalysed,
but all this seemed to happen very slowly.
I had a job in a public library

stamping out books, taking too many sick
days, moving out of too many houses
to return as a tourist and watch them stripped to brick.
Poetry too was beginning to wear its tweed
jacket again, and speak in muted tones
about the spiritually edifying architecture of Florence.

Briefly – I fell in and out of love
and in and out and in and out some more,
swore off drugs and took them up again,
finished two books and started on a third:
was granted a modest place on the honours list
whenever two other Sydney poets got together, pissed.

Poets's Note: May 1980
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(Do) the Modernism

You heard all about the New Romance
now I'm gonna show you all a different dance
it shakes up the metre like light from a prism
and the name of the dance is the Modernism

It started way back in nineteenth century France
when Baudelaire and Rimbaud thought they'd give it a chance
the folks at the academy think it's obscene
and no-one knows exactly what it means

Well Mallarmé he gave it another shove
it was Modernism two and the academy love
he said move over once, move over twice
c'mon baby let me throw your dice

England was lookin like inside a morgue
till T.S. Eliot did the Jules Laforgue
soon the band were boppin and doin the twist
they called them Ezra Pound and the Imagists

James Joyce as a young man really shook the scene
down the River Liffey down to New Orleans
and when Gertrude Stein shouted everybody heard
B-b-bird bird bird, b-bird's the word

Well world war one broke up the band
it turned the whole joint into a teenage wasteland
W.H. Auden and the boys at school
y'know they wanna join the Party wanna change the rules

The New Criticism and the superpowers
turned the Group and the Movement to a bunch of wallflowers
till Frank O'Hara shook it up in New York
he said let's do the Standing Still and the Walk

B-b-b-back in Australia they c-couldn't cope
they do the James McAuley do the A.D. Hope
they never busted a pentameter or stayed out late
till the g-g-generation of s-s-sixty-eight

1981

Five Spot

Monk's Coming
on the Hudson's
about appropriate
for breakfast.
White frost. Trains
in the clear air.
Discrete piano notes.
Outside,
sharp red berries,
grass shoots in the mud,
waiting – ghost moon
in a blue sky – for words.

Melancholia

or the light reflected off metal structures on the roof of the laboratory prior to a storm. The whitish sheets over a darkening sky, a series of regular solids, an obsessive repetition of inarticulate demands. Elsewhere there are holidays, banks circulating notes, a surfeit of intention, but here there are only moments, blocks of consciousness arrayed as patterns in fabric.

When the server goes down the sense evaporates. Corridors become walls, the narrative fades. The novelist has unravelled her plan in which moths have eaten holes. We are left as vegetation in a suburb is a memory of wilderness, a crossed wire bringing back thoughts of the past. Rumour itself ordains our history. Those marks on a fence speak as the lines of a book close upon themselves.

The blue distant hills beyond which is conjecture. The unnamed walking the wall, using up their time in the office. Everything nonetheless has a perfect three hundred and sixty degree clarity, is open to scrutiny. The top of the box removed, the silkworms among the leaves. Those white fibres form an elaborate chain in which the small and large circumferences are cemented forever.

The Submerged Cathedral

Pain won't last, neither will beauty;
once everything is registered as atmosphere
only change is left: each waving branch
or fall of light upon water, each
scent or sound suggests as it fades
a world diminished against a myth of plenitude.
Tectonic shifts of orchestral sections
modulate tones a later minimalism will
catch or freeze from the end of a lost century;
amber doorways long encased in soot,
underwater gongs rusted, their particles
cast into colourless depth
beyond a continental shelf.

PHILIP NEILSEN

b.1949

Philip Neilsen has written or edited fifteen books, including five collections of poetry, the most recent being *Without an Alibi* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2008). After a misguided beginning as a law student, he completed honours, masters and doctoral degrees in English Literature and Language at the University of Queensland, where he taught for nine years before moving to QUT, where he is Professor of Creative Writing.

He has been a member of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, Chair of the Queensland Writers Centre and president of PEN International: Australia North. He is a judge for the Queensland Premier's Prize for Poetry.

He has written a scholarly monograph on David Malouf (*Imagined Lives* University of Queensland Press) and edited two major anthologies – *The Penguin Book of Australian Satirical Verse* and *The Sting in the Wattle* (UQP). With co-editor Professor David Morley (Director of the Warwick Writing Programme) he is currently editing *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*. His poetry and children's books have been translated into several languages including Chinese, German and Korean and his short stories have been widely published. He has received a Writers Fellowship from the Australia Council, a CBC Notable Australian Book award and been shortlisted for an Aurealis Award, among others.

Narrative of a Leaf

Start with suspense.
Picture an average leaf
humming carelessly in the wind.
It doesn't know what's coming.
Complications.
June frost, drought,
delinquent insects.

It is hard work, putting food on the table,
growing a tree.
Forgoing the luxury of individualism.
This is the heroism
of the ordinary leaf.

With no rehearsal, jump into the void,
fall like an angel
with half a parachute.
Whether raked or left in peace
keep busy in community service.
Be an example without being didactic.
A kind of glory.

Death will be Unsighted

I come to the forest again
this anchor to earth
this complicated light,
and beneath its prodigious imagining
stand still in the hope
death will be unsighted
and slink back to the creaky staircase,
the level crossing, or beery pub.

Wild plums grow in tangled weight
each September, and over there
is a courtesy of wildflowers
where the thinking animal falters
beneath a flock of parrots,
is suddenly wrapped
in the same instinctive colours,
the details of existence brilliant,
more precise,
walking on dusk.

Crusoe Revisited

[the civilised world] could not, with all its enjoyments, restore him to the tranquillity of his solitude.” Richard Steele – reporting Selkirk’s words.

Alexander Selkirk stood trembling
on the sand, excrement dribbling
down his legs, his hair matted
with the fish leavings of seagulls.
Once rescued, he gestured
to the sailors to draw closer,
but could only moan and mumble
half-words. That half not misplaced
in the forest, the nights with no sound
except jaw crunch and rustle,
his sleeping bag of cats and rats.

*

I danced with the cats in the moonlight,
he tried to tell his rescuers.
A jig from a wedding in Largo.
And the cats, less fleet than he,
threw themselves about as best they could.
Always the smoke of pimento wood curled
up from the cliff, ambiguous in its aim.
His bible and books swam away from him,
signs with less purchase than shellfish,
or his budding Spanish turnips.

Returned to Scotland, a pirate hero,
he first eloped with shy Sophia,
then lived by himself in a cave again.
But this cave whispered of madness,
not the ‘tranquillity of solitude’.
Once he had carved his name on palm trees
to distinguish them from him.
But now the trees were aloof and coy.

He beckoned the sailors closer
and they marvelled at his long hair,
his cap of white fur, the tropical odour.
But they heard only the vocabulary
of loneliness as he tried to confess his
copulation with goats.

For a serviceable pair of trousers
he would gladly have traded
his Enlightenment epiphany:

namely, that the 'primitive' is neither
degradation nor celebration.
Just silhouette. The tree-line at sunset,
bats charred black on the moon,
the ice edge of a storm cloud.
The village Kirk would not accept
this as wisdom - but Heaven's
hard men had never dressed
in rotting sail cloth.

His knife wore down to its back.
He made a new knife from the
iron hoop of a wine barrel,
washed up in the morning
like a slow letter from home.
In delight he thanked the waves,
and they, curled upon his praise,
brought driftwood, their alphabet
in froth fragments, and his new voice.

The Lie of Biology

At Southampton my Great Aunt Eastman
shows me the table where every Christmas
she wrapped a Rover or Tiger annual
filled with soccer stories and Spitfires,
bound for steamy, respectful Brisbane.
In the photo I have a Dennis Lillie moustache,
like every Australian male in England, 1975.

In Scotland I travel into Perthshire,
Grandma Morris's town of Blairgowrie.
There are burly townsfolk in singlets
scattered along the steps by the river,
sunning themselves under an overcast sky.
In the photo I am wearing a padded jacket
designed for mountain snow survival.

Striding through Freiburg in summer
I feel the Rhine in my blood, the pine song.
Then I discover great grandfather Berndt
came from Koenigsberg, now in Russia,
frozen home of the Prussian officer class
and the meticulous, obedient bureaucrat.
In the photo I am the long-haired
conscientious objector with blue eyes.

Great grandfather Nilsson left Bergen
in 1874 for the windjammers and northern
Australia. I am delaying this fourth
and final trip, the one to Norway.
I can see the photo already: there I am,
standing by multi-coloured boats
in the rain, or on the edge of a fiord
with a beanie pulled down over my ears,
looking genetically uncomfortable,
trying to smile my way into the frame.

The conservative forest

for Bruce Dawe

This is a family-values forest. The red-checked table cloth
is spread on grass where the canopy has been removed.
The sun shines as required, a hygienic space to celebrate
freedom, strong government, luminous freeways.

The elitists wanted this closed to ordinary people,
and left for soap-fearing ferals, anti-social bushwalkers.
But now it is accessible, with tables made of eucalypt,
trees making a contribution, in full employment.

Long gone is the anarchy of wilderness, the over-excited mind.
Discipline is learned from a neat row of firs, a line of swings
under the Big Axe. The kids, Andrew and Emma, draw houses
with chimney smoke on paper the wood-chips have provided.

But do not relax. Be wary of seductive tunes from the foliage,
of horns and pipes, dangerous nymphs with plausible stories.
They whisper of peace won without cost in blood.
They meddle with gender and leave the young confused.

See them in jester's cloaks, their hair like snakes,
lodged in tree tops or introspective undergrowth,
cursing the honest toil of chainsaw and bulldozer,
the strong orange arms, the friendly giants.

At night you may hear gentle keening, the pioneers whose
prayers and sweat cleansed the scrub, made the ground
sweet for cattle and wheat, braved the savages and gypsies,
carved an asylum under stars for those who followed.

Today is a reunion, mum in her apron, children with toy guns,
dad will polish the four wheel drive. The park awaits our return,
invites us to enjoy the fruits of our labours. Sausages and wine,
the glow of the sacred barbecue. A fire to reflect our hunger.

ALAN GOULD

b. 1949

Alan Gould was born in London, England, in 1949. His father was a British army officer, and Gould spent his childhood in army camps in England, Northern Ireland, Germany, and Singapore—and in his mother's ancestral home, Iceland—before coming to Australia in 1966. He attended the Australian National University, where he completed an Arts degree, and became involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement. He subsequently gained a Diploma of Education from the Canberra College of Advanced Education, and worked in a variety of occupations, from relief teaching, to nuclear physics technician, to agricultural labouring. Since the mid-1970s he has been a full-time writer.

Gould began publishing poetry in Australian literary magazines in the early 1970s, and his first poetry collection, *Icelandic Solarities*, appeared in 1978. By 2010 he had published a further twelve collections, which have attracted considerable critical acclaim. His collection *Astral Sea* was awarded the New South Wales Premier's Kenneth Slessor Prize in 1981, and his volume of selected poems, *The Past Completes Me*, won the Grace Leven Poetry Prize in 2006. He has also been awarded various grants and fellowships, and has held writer-in-residence positions in Australia and the United Kingdom. Gould has sometimes been linked with others in a 'Canberra School' of poets, which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. He was founding editor of the ANU Poetry Society's magazine *Canberra Poetry* and also of Open Door Press, a small press managed by Canberra poets that published hand-set broadside poems. Besides poetry, Gould has written a number of novels, including *The Man Who Stayed Below* (1981), *To the Burning City* (1991), *Close Ups* (1994), *The Schoonermaster's Dance* (2000), and *The Lake Woman: A Romance* (2009). He has also written essays, autobiographical prose and criticism, and has published two prose volumes, *Three Streets in Search of an Author* (1993), and *The Totem Ship* (1996).

Wind

Restive brother—will not abide
this house or its rules;
all morning fidgeting with curtains,
then off with slam
a broken vase and wearing the shirt
from a neighbour's line;
heard of next, up near Townsville,
a huge evangelist
humbling the paradise bungalows.
The cordilleras
pay you ruinous rent, the dunes
adore you, their blonde
bellies fattening; tablelands
tittle-tattle
as you pass, Eurasia-bound
to rap Nechaev's
window. Instinctive, Heads of State
glance backward
hearing louvres rattle briefly
like gunfire.
For police and peasant alike
you come too swiftly—
how can one keep order, how make
the modest profit
in a world where there is wind?
Brother, you bring
dust, and foreign horsemen hungry
for surplus, insolent
for the favours of daughters. Always
there have stood
a few at the future's grille, their hands
stretched to you
for reprieve. And children in our time
have learnt to distrust
your eye, seeing in it their memories
of noise and debris.
It is these who toss still, on nights
in the upstairs rooms
of countries not their own,
hearing you pass
through the streets like long echelons
whispering
to the weak, the unprepared; 'Perish.
Perish. Perish.'

Port of Melbourne Song

Flash rooms of noise and stars
with mirrors on the wall—
and Port of Melbourne's bars
are whirling ports of call

where mirrors on the wall
reflecting heads that come
from sundry ports of call
in one delirium

are merely heads that come
and smile and are removed
caught by delirium
to leave what was most loved,

and choose to be removed
from every point of rest
and pitch what most was loved
into the sea's unrest,

which is a kind of rest—
vast room of noise and stars;
drink, for the sea's unrest
dissolves all Melbourne's bars.

Falling Asleep in the Afternoon

You start you start to slip like a cliff.
It is a crumbling of basis there might be
a tumbling of odd stones your bones
are slow-falling into their own places somewhere

and somewhere the compressor's doctrinaire chatter
has ceased to matter you fall through air
or rocks as epochs begin to happen to you somewhere
it is slippage or seepage it is sweet slippage
the world has swirled into brown or no-colour
it is hard to say or stir or be
and your open book the whirr of ducted air
involve each other like the sea and the sea's sighing
the sea's immense unspeakably remote crying and it is
O gentle and downward and language
is slipping off you gladly like a loose shirt
and you cannot be hurt here
and you are coming down and you are down.

Above you now have risen town over town maybe
there are eras working at their geologies
laying strata after strata turning trees to coal or oil
they are weightless and miles miles above you
might be the world with all its forgettable toil
carrying the traffic with its noise like rain
the tiny intricate clashing of colossal armies
without apparent pain
you jerk awake.

Across the park the earth mover
is still grind-shovelling
with its one yellow hand
like a crab feeding.
The cedars stand with their upturned laterals
like mossy pagodas.
And the further hills have done no more
than grow a long silvery fleece.

They face you with this question,
how a world can have remained so unchanged
through the aeons of your absence.

Quick Prayer

Yes, and I'll grab at hope,
land of the leal that brightens
beyond the dark tollways
of evidence, yes, hope,
as we take the sudden sidetrack
into surprising sunlight
and find ourselves absorbed
in watching our other lives,
where the children who came before
stroll with their mothers and tell
how it is that to step from time
is natural, natural as
to leap a little creek
or finish an intricate picture.

And charity, give me the nous
to try for, that gift to act
when the plump man, robbed
and bleeding beside the kerb
is inconvenient, ordinary,
yes, charity, quiet watchman
who walks in light between
the instant and the instance
with a little water.

And faith? No thanks. I'll walk
my little place and all
the eras my time concedes.
But faith's a gift, you say,
from far across the wires,
and I watch your metaphor
crisp the abstract noun
like a photo in its fluid.
A gift? Not here, not now.

With prayerbook and with leaflet
I sat in the gaze of faith,
and saw no gift. A gateman
checked each person's papers,
unhurriedly, even kindly,
but so held by the job
of who was in and out.
And was I too much given
to watching for the given?

For willingly, wilfully out,
nonetheless I ask
whatever has power to listen
within or beyond my thought,
to make me watchful for
howsoever that notion clears
where the aeons come to lie down,
where the poems arrive to be made
where the long evidence might rest.

The Great Poet's Gene

He dandied, but he suffered to renew
the gift he had to work his purpose through.

*O demiurge
of fierce old age
oblige his urge
to stay with edge.*

The trouble came with later echolalia, Ambition fixed upon a star's regalia.

*O demi-age
of fierce old urge
oblige his nudge
to grab some edge.*

His listeners asked him, 'Does your line grow subtler,
By this gene you take from Willie Butler?'

*O ego-merge
Of page from page,
Did they asperge
the poet's wedge?*

'The proof', he smiled, 'of voice above mere matter
Is exercising power over patter.'

*For he was surge,
his era's scourge,
And his mere rage
Supplied his edge.*

Headlong he vanished when the nth degree
Unwired his voice from voice's wannabe,

*so far downstage,
(I here allege)
he disobliged
his lineage.*

JENNIFER MAIDEN

b. 1949

Jennifer Maiden has been one of the most striking voices to emerge from a generation that included John Forbes, Martin Johnston, Robert Adamson and Michael Dransfield, as well as Joanne Burns, Pam Brown and Vicki Viidikas. In an era when the privileging of masculinity was starting to be called just that, women poets embodied in their work the changing roles of women.

The questioning critical voice in Jennifer Maiden's first book *Tactics* (1974) is obsessive yet self-deprecating. Her elegant, assured language loudly signals a new talent, and her prolific and constantly varying output since then has shown this talent to be honed and always developing, often in unexpected directions – including prose fiction. In *Mines* (1999), her thirteenth volume of poetry, she reclaims specifically feminine language – “vaginal red” – and writes a new form of mini-sequence, which Maiden calls ‘cluster’ poems. These cluster poems have almost the same start or the same end, but the rest of the poem veers off each time, so the repetition is like a motif. These poems question notions of voice and time, as if revealing parallel or expanding universes. The paintings of Georgia O’Keefe, gemstones and the poet’s daughter are some of the actual inspirations in *Mines*, spinning the poems out into endless reflection.

As has become more common in her work, actual political figures such as Richard Butler (Australian Chief Weapons Inspector to Iraq in the 1990s, and former Ambassador to the UN) and Madeleine Albright also figure as pivots for broader philosophising. Maiden’s viewpoint is never singular, but always multiple.

The Sponge

Radiator.
the warmth stretched her veins,
etched them puissantly on
her calves. Their daughter

under the coffee table,
kicked
the hem of the rug. Guilty.

The furniture
criticizes her limbs

His scrutiny maims
Her concentration forever

She bullies the cat prettily

Defensively
she rides the mop
& cackles, building
smokescreens of energy

He couldn't
carry her enough

In her despotic arms the cat
twitched as if stroked by its sleep

At night he thinned
the child's wine from
a carafe of mineral water

Boredom tightened her face
so close to tears & sleep
She munches something that is
splintery & loud

She meanders her crayon
on a colouring book:
the page
cuts her thumb,
thin & deep, & too neat
for belief or lamentation

* * *

The child rammed the

pramside with her head

* * *

The scotch maunders his tongue
his gestures try
to fling his own speech away

His wife oozes
clammy cleanliness
like a sponge, but

she trims her split-ends absently
with her fingernails in public,
he feels
that her listlessness almost
slanders him

He felt that she had ruined him
& even
in an oddly Victorian sense:
so social

it entered his emotions
slowly
then flooded him like sleep

he floated as it formed him

in a dream he had tried
to murder her
with his car
lethargically,
& she scuttled
out of fender-reach like a hen.

He told her &
she brushed but didn't quite burn
his forearm
with her cigarette,
but

she always touched him,
aimlessly,
passing by his chair

He had cashed his indignation
like a cheque. Pity
enervated him

She tossed the clean

towel onto the bed

* * *

She dropped a saucer & watched
the pieces too long before moving

The sun fried the paint into bubbles
The faucet dribbled rust macabrely
The house was never clean

She bit the sides of her fingers
thoroughly

Tap.
She crushed some ants
– it was going to rain –
with her foot, & regretted
the formic acid smell
on her shoesole

She pushed the pram forward, like
a soldier in a bayonet advance

The neighbours nag
each other flamboyantly
in continental tongues, admire

her son. The other child rammed
the pramside with her head.

She rounds the dough in her hands.
I am combining people.

Her somnolence filters the words
to safer proportions

I have crossed the line

The cat punched its head
softly against the window

Alone,
he would cook breakfast
mysterious crisps of meat
& liquid eggs – proudly,
demolish
his meal like an argument

From: The Problem of Evil

Off the Cuff

Street into sky, walls into sky, his ribs
taut with oxygen unclotting, uncurdling
like milk taken off the flame,
the words
are not quite the best yet.
The question
was asked when the MP was
in Macquarie St, askew with morning,
his imagination unthawed,
the mike
held too close to his lips, as close
as the visible frost of his breathing
at that time of day when air was metal
and his breath rose rapid as terror
in the tender pit of his voice.
This afternoon, he rings
through answers that are ringing
out the aftermath of air-conditioned choice
hard won from meat & wine & fruit & bread
& his inadvertent playing
with some old interrogators in his head.

© 1990, Jennifer Maiden
From: The Winter Baby

Coal

(When asked if there was an example who had inspired her as Dietrich Bonhoeffer inspired Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard replied, 'Nye Bevan'.)

Aneurin Bevan woke up in the Lodge, in Canberra.
Julia Gillard was on the TV. Bevan
inhabited the Lodge because Julia
was not moving in until the election, and
the cellar was particularly fine. Julia
disturbed him, however: he recognised
the defensive studied affability, soul
of a Welsh seaside town built on coal, but
could not dismiss her in an epigram: voice
whose lilt was abraded to a level, which
was not his opinion of Socialism: rather that it
was 'a biological necessity', that 'rabbit
warren accommodation leads to rabbit
warren minds', when he had organized
the last sixty years of Britain's Health
and Housing. Socialism was a mountain
range. He adored all mountains, felt delight
at Canberra's closeness to them. Negotiate,
he wagged his orator's finger, my dear,
of course, or perish, but all the numbers
which preserve us will burn us like dry ice.
He saw the problem was that those numbers
had already owed her the leadership, and no carbon
credit, even from Wales – the blackness
of mines like closing lungs – was ever
as powerful as that level-headed waiting.
Entitlement, he thought, is just asylum-seeking, if
the Lodge air restored mountains, like champagne.

© 2010, Jennifer Maiden

A Great Education

(When asked if there was an example who had inspired her as Dietrich Bonhoeffer inspired Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard replied 'Nye Bevan')

Aneurin Bevan woke up in flat Bathurst, to the drone of Julia Gillard's 'Ben Chifley, Light on the Hill' speech as she condescended that Chifley always regretted his lack of 'a great education'. Bevan had left school at thirteen, self-taught proudly like Chifley. He wondered if Gillard ever knew the power of freely chosen knowledge. When young, he'd detested that chainstore quality he called 'Everything in its place and nothing above sixpence.' She liked 'universality of education', her faith in uniforms startling to a man who thought socialism meant avoiding them, her stress on educational achievements hollowly passim insisting one acknowledge all her own. He thought of Chifley and Evatt roasting baked potatoes on a Murray houseboat, each free of envy of the other's erudition. Then his irritation became pity when he pictured Gillard Welshly stiff in a little uniform, Welsh-mam-bossy like his own mother, or nervously flirty, that old anxiety of women for respect in crisis leaping at their throats like blazer emblems, unable to orate as he had: to think swiftly on the spot, as his hand pressed on his heart.

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The Audience

*(Hillary Clinton has said that she talks to Eleanor Roosevelt when stressed.
Kevin Rudd has named Dietrich Bonhoeffer as his inspiration)*

Eleanor Roosevelt woke up next to Dietrich
Bonhoeffer and realized that this was
not Chelsea's wedding. It seemed to her
she had dozed off there but plainly here
was a different meeting. Hillary was suited
in black and white and cheerfully flirted
with Kevin Rudd, who flirted back
on the podium like a schoolboy with his
mouth full of cheap candy. She prayed
he wouldn't actually roll his eyes. Dietrich
smiled more benignly in his place, no doubt
having waited for Kevin of old, like this
and been consoled, even in 2010
New York and such hilarity of waste.

© 2011, Jennifer Maiden

Liquid Nitrogen

(A Defence Academy lecturer has stated that WikiLeaks encryptions are useless because the U.S. has decoding computers so huge they are kept in liquid nitrogen not to overheat)

George Jeffreys woke up in Langley, Virginia,
next to a vat of liquid nitrogen, where
bubbled a giant computer. Assange
was recorded on a monitor, Jeffreys
supposed in the spirit that Montgomery
kept a photo of Rommel in his tent. Julian's
white hair and odd angelic youngness reminded
Jeffreys of his partner Clare, her logic
also having quiet, loquacious rancour: a strange
likeness between them both and that balletic
White-Haired Girl, the symbol of China.
The M.I. who had boastfully shown
George the computer returned with more beer.
'Have you cracked it yet?', asked George. 'They
change it a lot but I think we crack it. I guess
whatever it is spooks us too much here
for decryption to be much use.' 'That's why
you don't want him snuffed, just on ice,'
nodded George, 'in solitary in Sweden?'
'Sure, and Extradition's messy; last resort: troubles,
but we want to send a message.' 'Yes,
as messages go, it does seem clear. But
with the results you like?' The M.I.
sniffed the U.S. beer, which left
mist on the air like the vat, where Julian
decoded again in slow, nitrous bubbles.

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From: *Liquid Nitrogen*

JOHN FORBES

1950 – 1998

In February 2008, family, poets and close friends of his generation, along with those who only knew John Forbes through his writing, gathered at Gleebooks in Sydney to commemorate the tenth anniversary of his death. The event was packed in a way that events for few living poets would be and was clear testimony to the enduring admiration, respect and love for Forbes, both as a person and as a poet of vital and enduring importance.

In the introduction to *Homage to John Forbes*, Ken Bolton notes a commonly held view of Forbes' work: "For many, John Forbes' poems constituted a high-water mark against which to judge their own work, and the critical acuteness his poems manifested (and which he could provide himself so entertainingly) was a constant pep-talk. They were a reminder of what one might aim for and a defense against what one could not allow – in oneself and one's poems." Elsewhere, Laurie Duggan furthers this, underscoring the critical acuity with which Forbes approached both his and others' poetry and its wider effect on the poetry community: "John wouldn't pretend (or allow you to) that anything could be gotten away with. He was his own harshest critic, and he may well have been the conscience of modern Australian poetry."

John Forbes was born in Melbourne, in 1950. Owing to his father's work as a meteorologist, during his youth the family moved between Melbourne, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Townsville and then Sydney, where Forbes went to the Catholic De La Salle Brothers schools at Caringbah and Cronulla. Having decided to become a poet in his teens, after high school he studied English Literature, Latin and Philosophy at the University of Sydney, dropping Latin for Fine Arts in second year. He later claimed that he regretted not that he had taken up Fine Arts but that he had given up Latin, reasoning that he should have dropped English instead as he "never found it very useful for the process of writing".

After his undergraduate degree, he travelled in Europe, working at various jobs in England and Greece, before returning to Sydney in 1976 to write a Masters thesis on Frank O'Hara. At twenty-seven, at the end of a Commonwealth Postgraduate Scholarship, he chose to abandon the Masters, and combined various jobs – as a labourer, storeman and packer, souvenirs salesman, all-night service station attendant and finally a removalist – with his vocation of poetry.

He lived in Sydney during the 1970s and early 1980s, becoming the friend and critic of poets including Gig Ryan, Ken Bolton, Laurie Duggan, Pam Brown, Alan Wearne, Carl-Harrison Ford and John Tranter. During this time, he also travelled to Europe on a Literature Board grant. In 1989, Forbes moved to Melbourne, where he taught poetry and wrote literary reviews to support himself. In the 1990s, he travelled again to Europe, once as Writer-in-Residence in Rome, and then in 1997 to teach at Loughborough University, visiting Peter Porter in London, John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan in Cambridge, and attending the Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry. In 1998, having returned to Melbourne, Forbes died of a heart attack at the age of forty-seven.

Forbes' poetry was first published in *New Poetry* in 1971. By the time his first collection, *Tropical Skiing*, was published in 1976, his work had drawn a considerable following that has since continued to grow. In 1974, with Laurie

Duggan, he started the little magazine *Surfer's Paradise*, which ran to four issues. Forbes' second collection, *Stalin's Holiday*, was published in 1980, followed by the award-winning *The Stunned Mullet* (1988), *New and Selected Poems* (1992), and the posthumous *Damaged Glamour* (1998) and *Collected Poems* (2002).

Frank O'Hara and Ted Berrigan are apparent and often referenced influences on Forbes' work. The latter Forbes claimed helped him escape "the talented earache of Modern/Poetry". Throughout Forbes' work references from and allusions to classical, medieval, Modernist and postmodern poetry are carefully wrought and talked into place with a wild and cogent array of the contemporary, from James Dean to the Ramones to Kraftwerk, from Bex to the *HMAS Australia* to Cultural Studies, from Art Deco lamps to the Ton-Ton Macoute haircut to the Goliard poets to "the throaty/chatter of the quad ZSU". Matisse, Muddy Waters, Judith Butler, Virgil, the Cambridge Poets, Paul Keating, Ovid et alia alight across Forbes' work. The range and voraciousness of the references coalesce rather than collide into a commentary, as insightful and entertaining as it is acerbic and profound, not simply on Australia or poetry, but on the contemporary itself, from the systems of thought that got us here to their political and cultural manifestations – not least the dominance of America and the underlying isolation and unrequited hopes (in love, yes, but also in relation to the present and societal) of the individual. While often speaking to an Australian audience, his insight and points of recognition translate beyond his nation:

*I wish we could be nicer
like the Americans*

*instead we are caught
halfway between*

*a European sense of style
you can always be at home in*

*& the Aborigines' knack
of passing the time—they know*

*that nothing matters too much
between now & forever, unlike*

*the industrious American
who looks around & sees*

*that Fate applies her chisel
to his own particular face*

*so when he stares back at Her
he's warm & essential*

(*'Antipodean Heads'*)

Forbes' work is frequently deeply funny, fueled by a use of irony and satire that is tough and socially aware, and determined by vulnerability or self-deprecation rather than elitism or pretentiousness. It is knowledgeable without being in any way

defensive or pompous. Carl Harrison-Ford noted that Forbes was “distrustful of even a whiff of high seriousness”, and yet his poems, with their humour and staggering twists of thought and image in narratives riddled with similes that confound as they illuminate, are serious in intent and application while remaining demotic and familiar. For example in Forbes’ ‘Ars Poetica’:

*You
celebrate your indifference
with a packet of lollies
or a Ton-Ton Macoute
haircut. It’s almost
pure debauchery, as prayer
is for example: your heart
is full of hatreds more
intricate than fractures
in shatter-proof glass.
(‘Ars Poetica’)*

or in the portrait of Melbourne (cum-self-portrait), in which humour and pathos emerge from the bathos of recognising a self-image out of time with its predicament:

*The incessant trams are the colour of the skin
after a course of suntan pills and your opinions
have to change a lot, like the weather but more
deliberately; where fashion is argued for, is
true love like two speech balloons that merge,
even before the attached figures have met?
At least your blinding headaches will modulate to a
slow wastage of the self, as your drugged &
artificial suntan fades. Then a voice you’ve never
heard before—your own—will say: ‘Be a caricature,
John, and not a cartoon, if you want to lose
your nostalgia for the sensual, glaring sun!’*

(‘Melbourne’)

Forbes’ seriousness is visceral and cranked, an at-times bodily experience of the mind making sense of the influx of the limitations and excesses of the corporeal, the cultural, the poetic and the political alike. It is poetry that celebrates as it lowers the High and raises the Low in culture (if those terms still hold value, and if not then it’s very much thanks to the work of poets like Forbes). Ivor Indyk noted that his poetry was characterised by an “uninhabited joy . . . voracious in its hunger for sensation and happiness” and that he was “the most innocent” of Australian poets, while Don Anderson described his vision as “constantly making the ordinary extraordinary”.

Comments by some critics that his work tends toward obscurity strike me as peculiar and strange. Forbes’ poetry speaks precisely and clearly in the language and reality of his moment. His work presents a recognisable Australia (albeit one that Australians may not always choose to identify with) in a colloquially deft and exact, culturally adept and democratic way. While Forbes’ work defies expectations,

it is never willfully opaque or needlessly or meaninglessly allusive, elusive or self-referential. Perhaps of all recent Australian poetry, Forbes' work is most successful in casting together a picture of contemporary Australia remarkable for its clarity and depth, while remaining human, immediate and personal. Cassie Lewis perhaps summed up this quality of Forbes' work while recalling her lessons with him: "One comment John made was that poetry should 'look out, not in'. And that by looking out you understand what's in you, just as when you gaze out a window onto a street new things occur to you."

Laurie Duggan wrote that Forbes "was his own harshest critic". His *Collected Poems* is a testimony to this much-noted critical rigour with which Forbes approached his poetry and the work of others. In editing these pages, Forbes' *Collected Poems* presented the unusual problem of there being very few, if any, poems that it would be easy to omit. As Gig Ryan writes elsewhere, his *Collected Poems* is "comparatively 'slight', yet unlike in the work of most poets there are very few failures". Ken Bolton noted, "Good poetry is hard to write. John wrote so very much of it – and so very little else." Forbes' work is so immediate, graceful in a way that is at once ferocious and well-tuned, exacting of language, speaker and reader alike; it rarely, if ever, repeats itself and never falls into the trap of too easy a style. As a result, the omission of any poem feels like an injustice to the reader.

Of course, that made editing the selection easy in one sense, knowing that every poem should be included and would find readers. That said, I hope readers outside Australia coming across Forbes' work for the first time here will chase up the rest of it in the *Collected Poems* and will heed Alan Wearne's tribute to Forbes: "among any of those born 1940–1960, anywhere in our language, I have yet to find lyrics of more finesse than those of John at his best. If he is still little known off-shore then it's for the rest of the world to catch up."

© Michael Brennan

Breakfast

for Ranald & Julie Allen

to wake up & throw
two bowls of muesli
at the wall miss &
crack a louvre is no
way to start married
life in Coffs Harbour
which makes you laugh
& that's better than
not, helping to clean
the marvellous organs
of the lungs & muscle
which are more than our
names / air & blood
flowing inside us
like currents that
travel up & down the
coast. The beaches
shift around & we go
after them as though
swimming & golf are
what we're 'made for'
at least they keep us
on the go so that
love arrives like
dawn in hot climates
—neither arse nor
class—just there
as the beach fills up
with light & you
swim out together
for the morning's first
wave before breakfast

Melbourne

after Max Jacob

The incessant trams are the colour of the skin
after a course of suntan pills and your opinions
have to change a lot, like the weather but more
deliberately; where fashion is argued for, is
true love like two speech balloons that merge,
even before the attached figures have met?
At least your blinding headaches will modulate to a
slow wastage of the self, as your drugged &
artificial suntan fades. Then a voice you've never
heard before—your own—will say: 'Be a caricature,
John, and not a cartoon, if you want to lose
your nostalgia for the sensual, glaring sun!'

Humidity

beetles thump against my
brother's kitchen window

the light attracts them &
they don't feel the heat

unlike me, whose skin is
almost as moist as the air

just before those downpours
men in one of the city's

2 classes—air conditioned
& the rest—call showers

they stay rational on days
like these while we feel

at worst our clothes are
wet steel wool, at best

like beached turtles on
heat. But I'd prefer to be

a beetle, the speed of my
wings to keep me cool &

a million bright things
to bash my head against!

Ode to Doubt

Luminous substrate
our views are just a veneer on, or like
the slats in a venetian blind
changing with the weather or the mood I'm in—
without you the light drones behind our heads
and we know what the world is like
or better be, if it wants to avoid
the pious grindstone of our self-regard
and tho' certainty has its saints,
to just step outside with you, like drinking
considered as experience,
would make their good deeds nobler
and, if nothing else,
abolish hagiography as a genre
(not to mention theories of reflection
and the clear-eyed luxury of teenage beliefs—
America's tribute to your absence).
We stand to be corrected & sit down unassuaged
because of you. You keep us modest
like the stones I used to shift around as a kid
assuming they needed a change of view. That
was the closest I got to playing God,
as if each brick had a message wrapped around it
or, vice-versa, the world was a fake parcel
with each layer of tissue
gauzy, ornate & gorgeous, keeping us from you.
Blanchot says, 'at the moment of death
we each experience our life as a lie', so
no wonder dying is important to believers.
With you that shade is always there & we become
a happy extension of the rocks & trees,
no longer certain
but a part of what we know.

Ode to Karl Marx

Old father of the horrible bride whose
wedding cake has finally collapsed, you

spoke the truth that doesn't set us free—
it's like a lever made of words no one's

learnt to operate. So the machine it once
connected to just accelerates & each new

rap dance video's a perfect image of this,
bodies going faster and faster, still dancing

on the spot. At the moment tho' this set up
works for me, being paid to sit and write &

smoke, thumbing through Adorno like New Idea
on a cold working day in Ballarat, where

adult unemployment is 22% & all your grand
schemata of intricate cause and effect

work out like this: take a muscle car &
wire its accelerator to the floor, take out

the brakes, the gears the steering wheel
& let it rip. The dumbest tattooed hoon

—mortal diamond hanging round the Mall—
knows what happens next. It's fun unless

you're strapped inside the car. I'm not,
but the dummies they use for testing are.

The Age of Plastic

after Ovid

The dictionary definition of change
means your face looks different in the water
& even tho' you'd feel at home down there
each moment spent at one remove, anywhere
between the mammal & the sponge,
you know you'd miss a particular cassette
idle tears or a glass of gin
& be irked by the serious options
a changeless life presents e.g. 'Minor
poet, conspicuously dishonest' would look funny
on a plaque screwed to a tree
while the blue trace of your former life
suggests an exception
generations will end up chanting: for them
the parts of speech will need explaining
not lakes or sleep or sex,
or the dumb poets of the past
who, being lyrical, missed out on this.

Four Heads & How To Do Them

The Classical Head

Nature in her wisdom has formed the human head
so it stands at the very top of the body.

The head—or let us say the face—divides into 3,
the seats of wisdom, beauty & goodness respectively.

The eyebrows form a circle around the eyes, as
the semicircles of the ears are the size of the

open mouth & the mouth is one eye length from
the nose, itself the length of the lip & at the top

the nose is as wide as one eye. From the nose
to the ear is the length of the middle finger

and the chin is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as thick as the finger.
The open hand in turn is as large as the face.

A man is ten faces tall & assuming one leaves out
the head the genitals mark his centre exactly.

The Romantic Head

The Romantic head begins with the hands cupped
under the chin the little fingers resting on the nose
& the thumbs curling up the jaw line towards the ears.

The lips are ripe but pressed together as the eyes
are closed or narrowed, gazing in the direction of
the little fingers. The face as a whole exists to gesture.

The nose while beautiful is like the neck, ignored,
being merely a prop for the brow that is usually
well developed & creased in thought—consider the lines

‘the wrinkled sea beneath him crawls’ locating the centre
of the Romantic head above the hairline & between the ears;
so the artist must see shapes the normal eye is blind to.

This is achieved at the top of the cranium where the skull
opens to the air, zooms & merges with its own aura.
Here the whole diurnal round passes through. In this way

the dissolution the quivering chin & supported jaw seemed
to fear, as the head longed for, takes place. The head, at
last one with the world, dissolves. The artist changes genre.

The Symbolist Head

No longer begins with even a mention of anatomy,
the approach in fact leaves one with the whole glittering
universe from which only the head has been removed.
One attempts, in the teeth of an obvious fallacy, to find
the shape, colour, smell, to know the 'feel' of the head
without knowing the head at all. And the quarry is elusive!
If the stomach disappears, butterflies are liberated & while
the head teems with ideas who has ever seen one? Equally,
the sound of a head stroked with sponge rubber or the sound
of a head kicked along the street on Anzac Day could be
the sound of a million other things kicked or stroked.
The head leaves no prints in the air & the shape of an
absence baffles even metaphysics. But the body connects
to the head like a visible idea & so has its uses, for
what feeling is aroused by *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*
but piercing regret for the lost head? And beyond the body,
a landscape is not just our yearning to be a pane of glass
but a web of clues to its centre, the head. And here, like one day
finding a lone wig in the vast rubbish dump devoted to shoes,
the Symbolist head appears, a painting filled with love
for itself, an emotion useless as mirrors without a head.
This art verges on the sentimental. It's called 'Pillow Talk'

The Conceptual Head

- 1) The breeze moves
 the branches as sleep moves the old man's head:
 neither move the poem.
- 2) The opening image becomes
 'poetic' only if visualised
- 3) but even so
 the head can't really be
 seen,
 heard,
 touched
 or smelt—
 the Objective Head would be raving nostalgia.
- 4) Yet the head is not a word
 & the word means 'head'
 only inside the head or its gesture,
 the mouth.
 So the poem can't escape,
 trapped inside its subject
 & longing to be a piece of flesh and blood
 as

Ten Pounds of Ugly Fat
versus
The Immortal Taperecorder
forever.

- 5) While anatomy is only a map, sketched
from an engaging rumour,
metaphor is the dream
of its shape—
from 'head in the stars'
to 'head of lettuce'

Between the two
the poem of the head is endless.

- 6) Now the world of the head opens
like the journals of old travellers
& all your past emotions
seem tiny, crude simulacra of its beauty.
& you are totally free
- 7) Greater than all Magellans
you commence an adventure more huge and intricate
than the complete idea of Mt Everest.
And this academy can teach you no more.
The voyage will branch out,
seem boring & faraway from the head,
but nothing can delay you
for nothing is lost to the head.
- 8) Goodbye,
send me postcards
and colourful native stamps,
Good luck!

Rocket to Rome

Read about the Goliard Poets
so long dead & so like you—

sile philomela pro tempore
surge cantilena de pectore

and think how little you deserve
the kisses of the Muse you serve,

play rock'n'roll for hours
until the neighbours cower

& the man downstairs complains
(& what a shame you can't explain

how Joey Ramone's Italian too—
the first worth listening to

since Rocco Scotellaro, or say
you're in love with someone new

who's like Italian to you—
beautiful and out of reach). Anyway,

replay Suzi is a Headbanger
or Rock, Rock, Rockaway Beach,

then get out the dictionary
& translate yourself to sleep.

After the Bombs we Invent the Future

Let's paint the ideal supper on the back of
our heads where the poem is a type of hole
rope tricks and grit allow you to descend—

we hope the earth has a centre, a fruity niche
safe from the spiked shoes of the mob; when
you cross to the pub
millions of hopeful athletes knock you over.

Can you feel their lurid needs, now that
the speed of light's become obsolete, now
the plankton is arising towards the oven?

Where did you get that hat, Tarzan? Like miners
caught in a war of time capsules we quail
before your green fedora, your dreams.

Their glycerine slowly covers Mt Everest
& without peaks, how will the survivors
invent a language? Oral hygiene be with us now & defend!

So polish your neglect of tennis, for soon
even casual knacks will yellow with nostalgia,
like the bandwagon of heaven's favourites

or nicknaming your emotions. Otherwise invest
in dilemmas: the better you forget the days of jam
the more relics will surprise you.

Still, after the Age of The Opposable Thumb there'll
be a lot to discover—will dolphins enjoy bingo?
Were the great comic operas written in perfect order?

On The Beach: A Bicentennial Poem

1

Your vocation calls
& you answer it, although
there are these episodes
in the shape of lips
 or a block cut from the ocean
 with gradually deeper shades of blue
as you trace down the seabed
like a shadow spreading across a billabong
with a quiet motor
on a pump in the background . . .
 Milled day-glo ephemera
sell you this image of Australia
& where it appears, flogged and true-blue,
your vocation looks
more like a blurred tattoo
or something you did for a bet
 & now regret, like a man
walking the length of the bar on his hands
balancing a drink on his shoe

2

(after Juan Davila)

 astonished
trade union delegates
watch a man behead a chicken
in Martin Place—isn't there
a poem about this
& the shimmering ideal
of just walking down the street?
 not being religious
we bet on how many circles
the headless chook will complete
& won't this do for a formal
model of Australia, not
 too far-fetched, not too cute?

3

Fatal as the blue-ringed octopus
but far less idle
the Royal Navy arrived,
ecstatic for routine . . .
I mean didn't you know that a commodore
has a broad pennant

& gets a 13-gun salute?
All you did was throw sticks & jibber. But I guess
you've worked that one out,
now that you've got a flag of your own.
So here's some tips for the future
i.e. the past considered as farce: be absolute & suave
& know that what they gave you when they took your land
is just a foretaste of what you'll get
now that your religious imagery looks subtle on a fabric.
Next week I'll do the convicts & how
George the Third was so much the king across the water
you had to piss yourself, standing up & drinking,
to be a secret Jacobite.

4

Speckled drongoes coo in the margins
parodying your abruptly tailored speech

& their singular point is this: the past
is like an Overseas no one's gone to

although we get a deluge of holiday snaps,
each one scrawled on to tell us what it is

(my two favourites are that blinded digger
being led off somewhere by his mates,

& my grandmother, with her mother, posed
in front of the forward gun turret

of HMAS *Australia*—it could be a cardboard
cut-out compared to them). But now

you are listening to the Speckled Drongo,
its myth of content brought to you

by Australian Armed Forces Radio,
broadcasting from RAAF Butterworth—

Message reads as follows: Message ends.

5

later,
& like any poet
avoiding myth & message
to fake a flashy ode, consider
what model of Australia as a nation
could match the ocean, or get your desk
to resemble a beach /
it would have to function

like Tom Roberts' *Opening of the
Federal Parliament*, our nation being
a sort of awkward, academic machine—
can't you see the feathers in my hat
& my gold striped pantaloons
as I jot this down
in the open-cut sestina form,
developing like a back-yard vegetable bed
bordered by upturned bottles,
nostalgia for a national style?
'Oh, my hat!' said the ADC.
'If I hold this pose much longer I'll collapse!'

6

Is this why you want to be primitive
but still an explorer,
blowing
on a conch shell in the early dawn
before the bodies scream under the keel
& the paddles flash out
to begin their fragile navigation
towards New Zealand?
Instead a bay surrounds you
like a gentle abrasive with something in it
that slowly sculpts your face—
you notice
each feature as it emerges,
empty as you imagined but expectant
with a blank, cut-up sense
of what your vocation is going to be,
glimpsed in the light
coming through the half-open shutters
in the lounge bar of the Coogee Bay Hotel
where you first dreamt up
this model of the Ocean
& watched it slide, slowly at first,
down the beach & into the surf.

Antipodean Heads

I wish we could be nicer
like the Americans

instead we are caught
halfway between

a European sense of style
you can always be at home in

& the Aborigines' knack
of passing the time—they know

that nothing matters too much
between now & forever, unlike

the industrious American
who looks around & sees

that Fate applies her chisel
to his own particular face

so when he stares back at Her
he's warm & essential

not reaching for a quip or a flagon
because he knows these things
are part of what he is

the way a mountain
is carved with the heads
of his Presidents

& we are left to wonder
what shape another 200 years

will leave Ayers Rock in.

ANZAC Day

A certain cast to their features marked
the English going into battle, & then, that

glint in the Frenchman's eye meant 'Folks
clear the room!' The Turks knew death

would take them to a paradise of sex
Islam reserves for its warrior dead

& the Scots had their music. The Germans
worshipped the State & Death, so for them

the Maximschlacht was almost a sacrament.
Recruiting posters made the Irish soldier

look like a saint on a holy card, soppy & pious,
the way the Yanks go on about their dead.

Not so the Australians, unamused, unimpressed
they went over the top like men clocking on,

in this first full-scale industrial war.
Which is why Anzac Day continues to move us,

& grow, despite attempts to make it
a media event (left to them we'd attend

'The Foxtel Dawn Service'). But The March is
proof we got at least one thing right, informal,

straggling & more cheerful than not, it's
like a huge works or 8 Hour Day picnic—

if we still had works, or unions, that is.

Event Horizon

The Greeks invented the dust cover only to paint it / but we think of art as an alibi & see through it. So now what's around us is no longer just what's beyond the pencil—charm is the property of pretending this isn't the case. Shall I borrow a morning suit from my uncle? What is it that makes shoes sensible? All this gets sprayed with beer or goes on a walking tour. Others abandon the pretence that will swallow them whole & organise a season ticket for their lost appreciation that returns to bother them like the ghost on a bad TV. But once gone their betting-slip accuracy withers to an unstable hunch in the morning: 'All that we truly admire won't crack if left out in the sun, although such art will trap us even more than its consumers—as if their attention was our only idea of light & we were like a piece of tissue snatched from a box of Kleenex. Thanks to this no space remains for us to project ourselves into & we are on the outside, forever & here more beautiful than any illusion or act of love perfect because not breathing on a Greek vase.

TV

dont bother telling me about the programs
describe what your set is like the casing the
curved screen its strip of white stillness like
beach sand at pools where the animals come
down to drink and a native hunter hides his
muscles, poised with a fire sharpened spear
until the sudden whirr of an anthropologist's
hidden camera sends gazelles leaping off in
their delicate slow motion caught on film
despite the impulsive killing of unlucky Doctor
Mathews whose body was found three months later
the film and the camera intact save for a faint,
green mould on its hand-made leather casing

Ars Poetica

‘I wanna be sedated’

The Ramones

Raving against the space
where the poem sounds
like a revolving door that
makes the noise a car makes
bumping into the dole—
that's the target. And don't
forget President Kennedy
travelling on the *SS France*
things are more like
they are now than they have
ever been before,
clear somehow, like
physical fitness. You
celebrate your indifference
with a packet of lollies
or a Ton-Ton Macoute
haircut. It's almost
pure debauchery, as prayer
is for example: your heart
is full of hatreds more
intricate than fractures
in shatter-proof glass.
Put a brick through
a real-estate agent's window
and it bounces back
and cuts you. That's what
I mean about targets. Or
you can read Mayakovsky / he's
a sort of Communist Bruce Dawe

Speed, a Pastoral

it's fun to take speed
& stay up all night
not writing those reams of poetry
just thinking about is bad for you
—instead your feelings
follow your career down the drain
& find they like it there
among an anthology of fine ideas, bound together
by a chemical in your blood
that lets you stare the TV in its vacant face
& cheer, consuming yourself like a mortgage
& when Keats comes to dine, or Flaubert,
you can answer their purities
with your own less negative ones—for example
you know Dransfield's line, that once you become a junkie
you'll never want to be anything else?
well, I think he died too soon,
as if he thought drugs were an old-fashioned teacher
& he was the teacher's pet, who just put up his hand
& said quietly, 'Sir, sir'
& heroin let him leave the room.

Death, an Ode

Death, you're more successful than America,
even if we don't choose to join you, we do.
I've just become aware of this conscription
where no one's marble doesn't come up;
no use carving your name on a tree, exchanging vows
or not treading on the cracks for luck
where there's no statistical anomalies at all
& you know not the day nor the hour, or even if you do
timor mortis conturbat me. No doubt we'd
think this in a plunging jet & the black box recorder
would note each individual, unavailing scream
but what gets me is how compulsory it is—
'he never was a joiner' they wrote on his tomb.
At least bingeing becomes heroic & I can see
why the Victorians
so loved drawn-out death-bed scenes:
huddled before our beautiful century, they knew
what first night nerves were all about.

STEPHEN EDGAR

b. 1951

Stephen Edgar was born in Sydney, Australia. He studied classics and English at the University of Tasmania and has worked as an editor and a librarian. He is the author of the poetry collections *Queuing for the Mudd Club* (1985), *Ancient Music* (1988), *Corrupted Treasures* (1995), *Where the Trees Were* (1999), *Lost in the Foreground* (2003), *Other Summers* (2006), and *History of the Day* (2009).

A lyric formalist, Edgar probes the ordinary and often overlooked details of life. Attentive to the natural world, his work touches on memory, science, and observations of personal and historical events and uses regular stanzas and subtle rhymes. Gregory Kratzmann, reviewing *Other Summers* for the *Australian Book Review*, noted that Edgar's "form exists in delicate equipoise with a passionate and highly individual vision of the world. The range of this vision is impressively wide, from the elegies for lost lovers to gentle tributes to parents, from political and social satire to gazes into the realm of nightmare."

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The jungle, from the floor to the canopy,
Clogs and entwines
Its every rung and level with rank growth.
The python dines
Among an epiphytic gaudery
And hungry vines.
On the mizzled hair of the two-toed sloth
Moss has designs.
Yet all that climbing tonnage is content-free.
The top limbs sway as though to write in air,
But can't remember what they scribble there.
Through the savanna's heat-glaze the herds pause,
Ripple and shiver,
Or graze hypnotically, or drop their young,
Which may deliver
Their wet thin steps into the lion's jaws.
By pool or river
They stoop at evening side by side among
The surface quiver
Of their reflexions as the light withdraws:
A fable set down in invisible ink;
They print their shadows on the pool they drink.
Even the perfect pictures in the shale's
Slow-motion traps,
The filamentous feathers, which one or two
Sharp hammer taps
Release, the fish in their meticulous scales,
The precise maps
Of leaves, did not direct this rendezvous.
They're simply gaps
In time, and have no part in these details.
The weird wiwaxias, worms and arthropods
Were empty of intention as stone gods.
Once, though, a figure had the thought to crawl
Out of the day
Into a cave's dark reach, its first invoker,
And there to splay
His hand against the tallow-glimmered wall,
And pause to spray
His mouth's cargo of spittle and red ochre
On the array
Of his five fingers, clear, indelible:
Author and content of the space displayed,
The maker's hand becoming what it made.

The Secret Life of Books

They have their stratagems too, though they can't move.
They know their parts.
Like invalids long reconciled
To stillness, they do their work through others.
They have turned the world
To their own account by the twisting of hearts.

What do they have to say and how do they say it?
In the library
At night, or the sun room with its one
Curled thriller by the window, something
Is going on,
You may suspect, that you don't know of. Yet they

Need you. The time comes when you pick one up,
You who scoff
At determinism, the selfish gene.
Why this one? Look, already the blurb
Is drawing in
Some further text. The second paragraph

Calls for an atlas or a gazetteer;
That poem, spare
As a dead leaf's skeleton, coaxes
Your lexicon. Through you they speak
As through the sexes
A script is passed that lovers never hear.

They have you. In the end they have written you,
By the intrusion
Of their account of the world, so when
You come to think, to tell, to do,
You're caught between
Quotation marks, your heart's beat an allusion.

Diversionary Tactics

Surely, here at the heart of things,
Here is the ideal place for the attempt,
Here where the Christmas sales dispose
Their day-late offerings
(From which, it seems, scarcely a soul's exempt):
Whitegoods and videos,
The manchester, the saucepans and CDs,
The swimwear, lingerie that sings
The body and its moistening promises.

In parks and by the harbourside,
Along the crescent from the Opera House
To Lady... Mrs Macquarie's Chair,
They saunter, stroll and stride
In variegated thousands with the nous,
The timing and the flair
Of cast auditions for the late Buñuel
(Where the surreal is satisfied
In the plain day), determined to be well.

But on the train, leave them behind.
Among the suburbs summer has its way
And foreign scripts on once habitual
Shopfronts flash to remind
The joggling passenger that still today
Continues the old ritual
With a new but undeflectable endeavour,
For all that childhood has resigned
Its codes and haloed circumstance forever.

A few more stops and the wide blue bay
Waits with its yachts and dinghies and houseboats,
And around the shore big houses dream
In glass. Not far away
The beach calls in like promissory notes
Its combers, down which teem
With barefoot mastery boys who improvise
Diagonals across the play
Of wave and dazzle and their girlfriends' eyes,

But make no difference. And so
Just down these steps, along where that car turned,
The ranks of roses, the grass floor,
The notices that show
The times, even the names of those concerned:
James Whelan, Dulcie Moore,
Baby Joanna Harrington — and the eye,

Drawn by a low-pitched tremolo,
Watches the fine smudge rise in the summer sky.

Lost to View

A range of clouds banked up behind the peak
Of that apocryphal
Blue mountain, with a wide, oblique
Burst of late sun
Projecting at the east's receding wall

A film of what the day so far has done:
A wind that tries to scrape
The breaking waves up as they run
Across the bay
And shatter at the foot of Fluted Cape

In tern and gannet-printed veils of spray;
And trees the wind has caught,
Which seem too self-contained to sway
When they are blown,
And only move as a pleasing afterthought.

No one. No human presence has been known,
Surely, to venture here.
It takes one blackbird to disown
That vagary
And, whistling just a few feet from his ear,

To call him back again and make him be
The subject in this scene,
The one who is required to see.
Another day,
No blackbird with its song will intervene.

The spray will hang its veils and the trees sway.

The Immortals

A breeze fills up the manna gum's huge lung,
That hologram of bronchioles. It sways there
Tethered and shifting like a hot-air balloon
Preparing for some fresh and doomed attempt
To circle the great globe. Heaped at its base
The litter of shed bark and collapsed boughs,
So much dumped ballast. Across an expanse of lawn—
The cat's savanna—a drowsing figure slouched
In an easy chair inhabits "Summertime",
Living by emptying this gap of day:
A straw hat on her face like a cartoon peon,
Her right arm limply draped over the side,
Jehovah's index finger pointing down
To where, half lost in the long grass, Daniel
Deronda's lying in Daniel Deronda,
His pages palping at the air, as though
Blindly taking in what it all is like.

It is hard to imagine. The shallow bay
Offers up to the light the illusory depths
Of a table buffed and polished to a lustre,
Except where an inlet-wide, flung net of wind
Hauls at the panicked shoals of chop and dazzle.
High up the sky is pale as faded denim
Worn through in a few frayed clouds, but where it comes
To earth, a cyan heavier than air
And not to breathe. And sometimes in the evening
The whole space thinks again, and sky and sea
Lie in each other's mirror, robed in gold
And self-absorbed against the envious land
They leach away, but for some failing islet
Or bluff that barely makes its presence felt.

Look, on her hand's back are the clues to grief,
Whatever she may think—those patches like
The remnants of a suntan, veins as blue
As any sky could wish, swollen through skin
As beautiful as birch bark, and as frail—
The emblems of a loss that will see out
The ending of the world.

Persisting in some region of obtuse
Sublimity, and full of an inhuman,
Distant pity, he'll contemplate her, baffled,
Then turn away perhaps like Beatrice
With her doubt-tainted smile. But he'll be there.

The heat is a dimension now, like time,
And as improbable. The cottage floats,
Not quite convinced it's happening, with its flies
And cracked linoleum, its shelves of books
Unaltered since the war, its bush-rat droppings,
The clocklike clicking of the roof—all tethered
To the least twitching of her dreaming fingers,
Her shallow breath. Later, before her friends
Descend, she'll wander barefoot through the rooms
In something easy with an ice-filled glass
And put some music on and watch the sea.

Auspices

In siftings of chromatic sediment
Shed by the winter hours as they decay,
With slow descent
Light settles through the lower sky in peach,
Then mauve, then pale self-abnegating gray
Against the water, now that day is spent
At Bennetts Beach,

Under the high withdrawing blueness, band
On band, like layers in a decorative
Bottle of sand,
Enclosed beneath the heavens' dome, as though
This were the perfect realm in which to live,
Preserved, unburdened by the least demand,
Or wish, to know—

And simply be. Along the beach convene
Some silver gulls which stand around reflecting
Upon the sheen
That comes and goes about their scarlet feet,
And crested terns fly back and forth inspecting
The shallows for a last titbit to glean,
And lightly treat

A two-faced wind that works its way across
The metal of the sea it tries to planish
And to emboss,
While deep in its unbalanced buffetings
Gannets alternately appear and vanish,
Plunge, rise, and loft and give their heads a toss.
These things, these things . . .

What future, though, in that simplicity?
If the observer alters what's observed,
Simple to see
The brilliant creatures may not long survive
Our scrutiny. And yet, what would be served
By aeons of extravagance to be
Merely alive,

Without the knowing eye, though its regard
Should bring to light what turns the world to stone?
Does the same hard
Attention that we boast of here abound,
Or has it been and gone among the starred
Immenseness—meaning we must fare alone,
Lost where we're found?

Beyond Yacaaba Head towards the east
The colors harbored in that sediment
Have been released
And all the lower sky is banked with ash,
Dulled to gunmetal gray. In the event
The gannets, calling it a day, have ceased
Their white panache.

Only the sandhills, looking west, declare
A citrine wash that soon will vaporize
Into the air,
Like some faint exhalation breathed upon
The night, in which a flock of ibis rise,
As though they had a mind to follow where
The light has gone.

The Angel of History

So with his mouth agape,
His wings outstretched and feeling for the air
As masterfully as a bird of prey,
And a fixed stare
Of mingled fascination and alarm
Before the onset of some shape
Unfolding at the same pace as the day
A present and impending harm,
He reaches out as he is forced away.

His face is to the past.
And all those brief, ambitious episodes
Strewn out—achieved, or botched, or incomplete—
Along the road's
Unravelling pageant that we both project
And roam through, are to him one vast
Impacted havoc which the years accrete
And slowly heave up, fused and wrecked,
Like Himalayas hurled before his feet.

Oh how he longs to stay
And wake the dead and make those ruins whole.
But a storm is blowing out of Paradise
That has control
Of his spread wings and, growing ever huger
And wilder, bends him to obey,
And for his contemplation pay the price.
He's swept away into the future,
To which his back is turned—his task, and vice,

But to record, not to restore, the toll.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

b. 1951

Peter Goldsworthy was born in Minalton, South Australia, in 1951, the eldest child of two teachers. He grew up in South Australia and in Darwin, where he attended Darwin High School. He subsequently studied medicine at the University of Adelaide, and began practicing as a doctor in 1974. He continues to divide his time between medicine and writing, living in Adelaide with his wife Helen and family. A prolific writer, Goldsworthy has published a number of novels: *Maestro* (1989), *Honk If You Are Jesus* (1992), *Magpie: A Novel* (1992), *Wish* (1995), *Keep It Simple, Stupid* (1996), *Three Dog Night* (2003), *Everything I Knew: A Novel* (2008), as well as collections of short stories: *Archipelagoes* (1982), *Zooing* (1986), *Bleak Rooms* (1988), *Little Deaths* (1993), *Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam* (1999), *The List of All Answers: Collected Stories* (2004), *Gravel* (2010). He has also published a collection of essays, *Navel Gazing: Essays, Half-Truths and Mystery Flights* (1998), and edited the anthology *True Blue? On Being Australian* (2008). In 2001 he was appointed Chair of the Australia Council's Literature Board, and in 2010 he was created a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his service to literature.

Goldsworthy began publishing poetry in the early 1970s, with his work appearing frequently through that decade in literary journals, including *Westerly*, *Makar*, *Meanjin*, and *Poetry Australia*. In the later 1970s he became involved with the Adelaide-based Friendly Street poetry group, and his work appeared in a number of Friendly Street Anthologies of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Goldsworthy's first poetry collection *Readings from Ecclesiastes* was published by Angus and Robertson in 1982; the volume attracted significant critical attention and went on to win the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for best first collection, as well as the FAW Anne Elder Prize (joint winner with Gig Ryan), and the South Australian government's Biennial Literature Prize (1984). He has published seven poetry collections to date, including two volumes of selected work, *This Goes with That: Selected Poems 1970–1990* (1991), and *New Selected Poems* (2001). His poetry is particularly noted for its sharp observation, wit, and satirical humour. He has also written the libretti for the operas *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1996) and *Batavia* (2001).

Australia

Our Earthen dish is seven parts water,
one part China, and a tiny bit japanned.
Its spread of foods is well-presented:
ice sculptures at both poles, and licking-salt
elsewhere. Give me a lever large enough -
a cosmic fork or skewer - and I would take it
to a table: its sherbert fizz of surf,
the creamy ice-cones of its toothy alps,
the spice of islands dotted here and there
like cloves jammed in an onion. Turning
this common dish as slowly as a day, I'd taste
the sweet-and-sour river deltas, the swamps
about its world wide waist, all of which
smell fishy. As do many maps of Tasmania,
most of them in other places: forest fuzz
itchy with green pubic life. Lastly comes
our smaller plate, single and tectonic:
our turf, or lack of it, our baked and gritty
crust, lightly watered, sifter dusted,
and sarcastic with its hints of eucalypt.
Its thousand mile creek tastes too salty,
its muddy waters barely moving, but
moving enough to stir a homesick heart.

Jokes

Don't tell me jokes,
I know about jokes.
They think they are funny.
They think they can get away with things.

I don't know everything about them,
just enough. I know this:
that they refuse to be remembered,
slipping the mind's fingers,
a shoal of laughter, vanishing.

And this: that they hide still inside,
deeply. Delinquent poems,
absconders from custody.

Of course they think it a great lark,
sneaking back again and again:
the grenade of laughter,
then silence.
I prefer to find it tiresome.
And a little sad.
All that repetition!

Don't pigeon-hole me:
I appreciate a good joke.
I said appreciate, not laugh at.
For I will no longer laugh.
I will not answer their ridiculous summons,
I refuse to accept their subpoena.
Never again will I eagerly rip open
the scented envelope
filled with strange plastic.

There are only four jokes anyway:
the custard pie, and the breaking of taboo,
the game of words, and the thing
we are each most afraid of.

Credo

I believe in the infinite line,
the straight line between points
and the equality of all right angles.
Amen.

I believe also
in narrowness and excellence.
In the importance of measurements.
I like to keep things
inside things. I like to keep
adequate records.
I like to gazette.

Of course I prefer nouns to verbs
the label affixed, unmoved.
I like to draw chalk-lines.

I believe in making lists.
In quartz clocks,
calendars, reminder calls, alarms.
I like the hours 9am and 5pm,
and taking to the weekend shapelessness with these:
hedge-clippers, edge-trimmers,
a lawn-mower on the lowest notch,
secateurs.

I like collecting things
and looking up their names in books.
I like Killing Jars.

Always I will prefer the unblemished butterfly
pinned to a mounting-board
in the hard cone of a 60-watt desk-lamp

to the tattered joy
circling in a column of a dusty sunlight
somewhere.

Roy G. Biv

Red

Two colours are enough
to map the world
for frugal tribes:
red or not, hot or cold,
colour-deaf to all the shades
between, because unnamed
they can't be seen,
and names would be
a waste of useful breath.
Which makes me think
what I must miss
without the words to look:
what bloody riot lies between
the bars of salmon-pink and puce,
or herring-red and rouge?

Orange

Orange is also things: hazard-lamps
that hang in citrus trees, still glowing
when the world's gone grey. They guide
our pale moth-hands through dusk:
the torch of a valencia, a smaller-wattage
tangerine, a navel like a big bed-lamp
that hoards the light, and gives it back
all night, or till we've peeled the last
thick scab of orange hide, and sucked
our juicy luminescent fingertips,
and cleaned the whiter rind
that's wedged beneath the nails.

Yellow

High in the blue is a big Yellow Page
advertising summer, a yolk-yellow
sun, hotter than the moon but also
made of cheese, or melted butter.
It stings our upturned faces, rubs
our skins with sulphur mustard till
those tender body-bags hurt like hell.

Green

Greens make me want to eat.
Even when those greens are grass
they still look good enough
to graze. I like them vined
in little balls, or bunched
in brittle clumps I rip apart
and toss. They comes in shapes
and sizes, all part of greater
green, a crazy-pave mosaic:
pea-, leaf- and olive-,
gooseberry- and lime-
(Wherever green is worn
I write it out in rhyme).

Blue

Blue light in dairies gives better milk
which may be why Whomsoever chooses
chose blue for His or Her ceiling-theme,
a colour-scheme that makes us all
feel good, or not so blue.
I remember my first set of Derwents
and the sky and sea I coloured-in.
The blues in their flat tin box
were a rainbow of blue themselves:
smalt- and sky-, cobalt- and Prussian-.
There were even more if you could trust
British Paints, or even Roget's
where I found two separate words
whose pigments seemed to run together:
cyanotic hyacinth, my favourite colour.

Indigo

Indigo is another sound
that's justice to its sight:
a noise that looks like inky dusks
silting up the air with dark.
Each night the other colours leave us
first, sucked down the western plug
in order of appearance. Indigo
remains, inking in its xerox silhouettes
and knife-edge lunar cut-out shapes:

the last to leave, its job to turn
the light out, shut the door, and leave
no chink of colour in the night.

Violet

More cello-coloured than viola,
more iodine than violin, violet
is the bloom of the double-bass
wavelength; light at largo pace,
eyes set at widest-aperture,
so wide that they are really ears.
Beyond here, everything is ultra.

Designer Universe

Even in the smallest rooms of sense
there's too much world to choose:
a sum that's always less than parts.

Each visual field's bright boutique,
each ear and hand and tongue
a shelf of tease-wrapped gifts.

Unpeel the outer layers
and tears of joy will fill the eyes
until we can't see what's inside.

Step back to take a wider view
and the problem stays the same:
more things than names,

more names than time.
They paralyse our choice.
They clog our doors with stuff,

none of which is owned by us,
unless in knowledge-creep
there is a song, a Dreaming map

that gives us native title
until it's taken back.
For it is always taken back.

There is a deeper ownership
in every gift that's leased out
to our eyes and ears and fingertips—

but after us, reverts, reusable,
its label of design indelible,
because unseen, a subtle

corner signature it wears as proudly
as we wear our navels,
telling how and where we came,

as if above the whole inventory
there is one simple heading:
By the Same Author.

A Statistician to his Love

Men kill women in bedrooms, usually
by hand, or gun. Women kill men,
less often, in kitchens, with knives.
Don't be alarmed, there is understanding
to be sucked from all such hard
and bony facts, or at least a sense
of symmetry. Drowned men — an
instance — float face down, women up.
But women, ignited, burn more fiercely.
The death camp pyres were therefore,
sensibly, women and children first,
an oily kind of kindling. The men
were stacked in rows on top. Yes,
there is always logic in this world.
And neatness. And the comfort
of fact. Did I mention that suicides
outnumber homicides? The figures
are reliable. So stay awhile yet
with me: the person to avoid, alone,
is mostly you yourself.

PETER BOYLE

b. 1951

Peter Boyle was born in Melbourne in 1951. He contracted polio as a young child and spent considerable time in hospitals, and at the age of eleven he moved with his family to Sydney. He attended Riverview College, where he discovered his gift for languages and interest in poetry, and he subsequently completed an Arts degree at the University of Sydney. He has worked as a teacher of English, History and Communications in secondary schools and in technical colleges.

Boyle's first book of poetry, *Coming Home From the World* (1994), won the New South Wales Premier's Award and the National Book Council Banjo Award. *The Blue Cloud of Crying* (1997) also won the Banjo Award and the Adelaide Festival Poetry Prize. Besides publishing his own work, Boyle has translated extensively from French and Spanish poets, notably Lorca, Vallejo, Eugenio Montejó and Pierre Reverdy.

Boyle has read his poetry at numerous festivals including International poetry week, Caracas (2004), the Medellín International Poetry Festival (1997), and the Festival de Poésie anglo-français, Paris (1999). His poems have been published in such magazines as *slope*, *Verse*, *Jubilat* and *Three Candles* in the USA; *Heat*, *Island*, *Southerly*, *Salt*, *Overland* (Australia); *Poetry Review* and *Shearsman* (UK). His poetry has appeared in translation in *La traductière* and *Poésie / Première* (France), *Prometeo* and *Revista Casa de Silva* (Colombia), *Hoja Verde* (Chile) and *Alhucema* (Spain). His translations of French and Spanish poetry have appeared in such reviews as *American Poetry Review* and *Jubilat*. A selection of his translations of César Vallejo, *I am going to speak of hope*, was published in 1999 by the Peruvian Consulate, Sydney. Translations from French poets, notably Pierre Reverdy, René Char and Yves Bonnefoy, have appeared in *Jubilat* and *Verse* (US) and *Shearsman* (UK).

In 2004, a collection of his translations *The Trees: selected poems 1967 – 2004 by Eugenio Montejó* was published by Salt publishing (UK). This is the first bilingual edition of the poetry of Eugenio Montejó and represents more than six years' work in the translation of Eugenio Montejó's poetry. He has recently translated poetry by the Australian-based Chilean poet Juan Garrido-Salgado; a collection of these poems was published in the book *Unmoving Navigator who fell in love with the ocean's darkness/ Navegante inmóvil, que amó en la oscuridad del océano* (2006).

Boyle's work has always been marked by the timbres and sensuality of Spanish, and the particular and subtle melancholy of South America, which is not unusual considering Boyle has translated many of the great Spanish-language poets, and to a large degree it was within these reference points, coupled with his abiding engagement with the work of Char, Reverdy and Bonnefoy, that I saw his work: a gentle but profound mix of the melancholy and surreal, a dirge made of earth and blood, of the estrangement of language to the senses and their inextricable embrace.

With the *Apocrypha of William O'Shaunessy*, Boyle has exponentially, perhaps infinitely considering the gaps and fissures he creates as much as those that he fills, expanded his inscribed universe and with its publication will surely step to the forefront of contemporary Australian writing. Teasingly enough, Boyle has yet to

place the *Apocrypha* with a publisher (I hope a bidding war ensues from the samples published here). The *Apocrypha* spans the vistas of the pre-Socratics, Plato's Academy, Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, the burgeoning of the Dark Ages, and the birth of nineteenth century philology as it presents the various translations of lost works by Boyle's fictive Classicist contemporary, William O'Shaunessy. Among the *Apocrypha* are Photius of Aegispotami, "Against Pythagoras"; Xenophon, *Conversations from the last years of Socrates*; Herodotus, *The Uncut Histories*; Diogenes Caserius, *The Deeds of the Neglected Emperors*; Catullus, *The Sermione Notebooks*; and the mesmerising poetry of the variously coloured books of Ebetsum.

Boyle draws on the lacunae of history and historiography, of literature and philosophy, but most of all philology — equally as "a love of words" and a study into their origins — forming a prodigious reimagining and so reinvention of not only the foundations of Western thought but a reinscription of its physical, metaphysical and temporal constraints. Stepping from, say, the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, where Plato re-examines the physical, metaphysical, psychological and social principles governing the world, and also introduces Atlantis to world literature, into the *Apocrypha*, readers will find an impressive and successful effort to redraw the maps of the thought and the imagined, creating a world as baffling as it is convincing. Poetry and paradox proliferate into a miraculous experience of being, wherein the union of language and sense is exacting and immediate.

The *Apocrypha* suggests the same desires for power and prestige that rule the present moment ruled over and ruined the lost ages and cultures it chronicles, and in many ways unfolds as both a celebration of the vertiginous possibilities of language and meditation, and a plaint against the same violence, myopia and self-interest that still savages the world. While an apparent long-study into the classics of Greek and Roman thought and natural history guides the *Apocrypha*, Boyle masterfully creates an athenaeum of the imagination that recalls the same intelligence and mordent humour that first set about building Tlön, Uqbar, and the Library of Babel, reveling in the interplay of worlds so close together, fluctuating between thought and sense, the familiar and the strange.

In the worlds of the *Apocrypha*, the reader will discover instances of metaphor as ontology and of language as experience. Boyle draws back the veils of time and culture, offers the reader a share in the beauty and joys of language, and sets forth the commonality of love, compassion, justice, pity and ethics that might bind us beyond ourselves into a community as humans, not cultures or civilisations. While the *Apocrypha* celebrates language and the labyrinthine ways of the imagination, and can be seen at once as a homage to Borges and a continuation of his intellectual playfulness, Boyle may also be tacitly recalling another great Spanish poet-philosopher, George Santayana, and suggesting amid the narratives of fractured and clashing civilisations, that if we do not learn from the past, if we do not engage with it critically and imaginatively, and so imagine new futures, we are doomed to repeat it.

The Museum of Space

In the museum of space you open the lost codes. They glide around you — emblems and word fragments, pierced shells that become once more perfect spheres. You remember watching a man counting the beads. Though small enough to vanish into his hand, they tumbled through infinite circles. As you looked out one window, the cliff directly in front loomed up like a future you would never scale. Why are water and sand always used to measure time passing? They must then be the one substance — what never gets dry, what never gets wet, the absolute embrace that says, *Wade into me*.

In the high empty room of the museum the artist sits in primordial solitude, slapping layered paint on the wall. It twists and curves, at one moment resembling his face, at another the sky. The same idealised bubble sustaining both life and extinction. And the children who walk across the room scatter iceblock sticks and chocolate wrappers that give a wispy transience to the portrait.

In the museum of space no art work is ever completed. Sand and water filter in equal measure from the ceiling to the basement. Constructed on the ancient alignment of heaven and hell, the museum opens onto the silent inexhaustible corridors of the brain.

Parable of the Two Boxes

In the small box what do you hold?
Self-righteous evil

In the large box what do you hold?
A great emptiness

With what do they make the small box?
Out of lives out of breath out of living

With what do they make the large box?
Out of what is left over from the small box
Out of what was too invisible to be made into the small box

Can you describe what you see when you open the small box?
Two heads with one face
A normal whispering of words
Perhaps the small clink of power

Do you see that or hear that?
Seeing is hearing when things are small enough

And the large box — what do you see inside that?
Earth, lots of earth, I run my hands through it, it is warm in
places like ashes have been ploughed into earth, like cities
have bled into it, and glass and bones have dissolved there

Could you give a word for the large box?
It is what is done to us

Is there a word for the small box?
No — yes, it is what happens. Perhaps it is what a large
number of emptinesses do to save themselves when they
are still at the point of wanting to save themselves

What temperature is the large box?
Cold, very cold

What temperature is the small box?
Also cold, but there are small glints of burning as well

What else is in the room?
Nothing

If you mixed the boxes what would happen?
They would go back to being themselves — it is their nature

What can you do then?

Yes, what can you do?

Why the Minotaur is Always Sad

So many years underground,
his head dizzy from bumping all those memory-clouds.
Always to be the centrepiece
of someone else's puzzle.
His endless consumption of women
didn't help much.
And so this morning he has arrived in his kingdom:
a wise gathering of rocks,
a little girl trying to paint flowers on the pebbles
but the waves keep washing them clean,
his chair opposite the ocean,
the tree with its gaze that says
'I too have lived elsewhere'.

From Instructions Given to the Royal Examiners in the State of Chi

Examine the candidate's state of mind
as he inscribed the answers to all of the above
and estimate the temperature of his brain cells
as he lay awake in the cubicle at night
longing for the raw oysters with calamansi juice of home.
Assess the longevity of his nails
as they quivered lightly over the brushstrokes,
the density of his gaze as he reread the instructions.
Reckon to the nearest decimal place
the honesty of his bones
as he let memory drain into the page.
Calculate according to established formula
the expression of his face, old or young,
as his lips guessed the first hushed sounds of the rhythm
and fix clearly in your mind what lay behind that face,
the trembling moment of pure emptiness.
Identify the direction of the wind
as it hurries the leaves of all the provinces
away from everything known,
brushing them with the fragrance
of unnamed creatures waiting to be born.
Remember for what purpose
you are setting down these dreams
under such limited starlight.
Remember the waves which are forcing you
further and further off all courses into the terrible wilderness
of death.
Then forget all of yourself and all your hopes
and write your mark and comments in the correct space
for the perusal of a higher order.

The Unknowable

Who had children. Who died.
Who found himself lucky after thirty years
and stumbling home realised
it was a simple error.
Who ruled behind the scenes in the Department of Misinformation,
who was later conscripted
to underwrite Armageddon.
Whose hand was lost in a sawmill
and was met again as the strange dust
of a new-found galaxy.
Who migrated to the other world
but came home to bury the dog.
Who divorced and died of alcoholism
in the country town where destiny misplaced him.
Who topped high school, failed everything else
twice, married money, then slept through
the death of three children.
Who was invisible, became a wall, became a street,
entered real estate, bought a city,
retired into owning world opinion.
Who saw his son indicted for reluctance, shackled and maimed,
blamed for the colour of the sky.
Who inscribed his name in the old script,
the one no one reads anymore,
the one where things inscribe themselves
so what they are
reads itself back
in us.
Who was my shadow when daylight was.

From An Exquisite Calendar for the Duke of Madness

A simple flat bottomed boat was the most practical vehicle to travel across to that other shore with its tightly bordered countries, its languages and customs jostling so close against each other, the bedsheets of one nation poking into the eyes of another's laundry, shelves crammed with receptacles for all flying and crawling beings. She had wandered into a land that was called madness. It exploded outwards in her dreams—the cast too heavy, too many people crowding into narrow corridors, massed outside on the landing, the floorboards bound to give way. She was dressed like Ophelia, like a jester garlanded in marigolds. At the same time destiny had singled her out to be a Renaissance prince, fumbling with numerous cards all inscribed with the names of flowers, waiting nonchalantly for the beheading.

And then she was there suddenly far ahead of me—on the small road that leads into the heart of the sky. And I was stuck where I was, here amid the wild silence of dead voices.

Within days the trees arrive. The litany of warriors finishes. The rollcall of decapitations reaches an end. While in the mountains winter is laying out its precious dust that tastes of arsenic, it is summer still among the loquat trees by the lake. Once, when strange voices screamed and wept and shattered the house, the three of us children slipped away to the field by the river to tell each other stories and sleep. On the second night as we camped there suddenly the sky was no longer visible. Benign, withered and made entirely from the hair of old dolls, a forest had settled over us. The small boy with the long white shirt who sleeps under my eyelids woke up then. As if to calm himself, his lips were softly intoning: 'In another lifetime I will be here among you, straight as a tree, alive and simply blossoming.'

After the rains came the season of rats, of blood red thistles and boundless peaches, the sudden growth of fingernails, of fields laced with blue skies and immense plains that metamorphosed into storks. Those were the curiously curved afternoons when families deciphered codices in the cool of the orchard and when black swallows visited from their kingdom of midnight under the earth. Beauty stood, a naked replica scratched to pieces by the claws of wilful cats and the gallery of abstractions had to be draped and stored away in the vaults of abandoned small-town banks at the edge of the lonely wheatfields. For this season was the harbinger of immense space and the precision of sudden arrivals, preposterous combinations of numbers and scribbled lines, ingredients and beings rising out of soil. How alert everyone was. Sleep was unheard of in those days. Sunlight unfolded, as did the quaint maps left by dead promises, numerous designs for impossible machines, the at-last-revealed instructions for a world so absurd the whole family could only break up laughing, then send a runner out for more wine. In those days hands opened, enmities were forgotten, the black shirt and suit of mourning ripped spontaneously apart, and so grandfather, tottering on the balcony with his cigar, would survey how the distances suddenly stood open and pronounce, 'Today for fifteen minutes there is no more death.'

These Autumn Days

An immense star lodged in the eye that enables us to orient our way through inner loneliness. Collapsed corridors linking childhood to a locked drawer in an abandoned filing cupboard gathering authority from its years under water. How the noise the wind makes in the trees alters subtly over a lifetime. Handing on wisdom in the usual ways. Why the sky is blue. Why stones rarely find their true owners. Injustice and its moth-eaten declensions. Yearning as our own face offered so unguardedly once to the unique trembling of the universe, returned to us in the months before our death as the shimmering stillness in a puddle's skyward slant.

The Joys of Mathematics

At fifty I will begin my count towards the infinite numbers.

At negative ninety nine I will start my walk towards
the infinitesimally small.

At one over twenty seven I will inspect the first bridgeworks.

At twenty two over seven I will write a message in a bottle, entrust it to
a sea turtle, slip under a wave and sleep.

At eighty seven sparrows will land on the windowsill, pecking a hole
that leads inside my arm.

At 127 I will begin to arrange the children's pillows, carefully filling
each one with warm handfuls of snow.

At ten to the negative six our friends from the White House will arrive,
handing out glass beads and broken shells filled with recently
perfected poisons.

At the inverse square of sixteen the sky will curve over blue lakes, songbirds
settle at dusk, a small train rattle off towards a village that leans
against a single church spire.

At one over negative twenty two I will start to dream in Sanskrit, creating a
swarm of brown ants to bring back a baby's rattle from the
edge of a mud slide.

At ten to negative two over three I will open my heart, letting go of all vanities,
right down to the wilted bones.

At the third transfinite number I will give up easy answers.

At e to the $i\pi$ the earth will bristle with skulls and weapons, dolphins will
proclaim the first inter-stellar arms bazaar in Antarctica, the
new born will drink only lead, the elderly will wander the moon
in the quest for warmth.

At one I will open my eyes.

At zero I will put the key back under the mat.

Green Island, Taiwan

Falling asleep on a small low island
so far from any mainland
is like preparing for death.
One day it rose out of sea,
one day it will return to it.
Low wind-blown tangle of greenery,
dark volcanic rock carved by wind,
deer on the slopes of the single spine of mountains.
Here phones die out, power generators
stutter to a halt
and always the sea, the sea.
And one morning a blue fresh shift of air
rising within me.

Deep sleep of the island, this island sleep,
like seaweed, like the drumming of waves,
like the deep-cut channel of the harbour
where an anchor thrown off the deck of a fishing trawler
goes down forever
lodging me further and further
under the porous layers of the earth,
myself a transmigrating butterfly,
an earthworm, an exploding head
of pollen filaments,
this small shell of an island
lodged out in mid-ocean
in the part of the earth
that lies closest to dawn.

Rain at Midnight

A delicate thin rain
surrounds the house where I write
perched on the edge of nothingness.
If everything was a dream,
a sad lost life founded on vanity,
the rain tells me nothing.
As if sitting mesmerised
in a car ride to an airport of the dead
I recite the names
of everyone I'm leaving.
The rain wipes out the earth
and I know that nothing can come back.
I could be travelling.
I could be staying still.
The rain goes on
monotonous, beyond all translation,
a pure eloquence
the other side of human speech.

JILL JONES

b. 1951

Jill Jones was born in Sydney in 1951. She has worked in a number of different fields, including legal publishing, journalism, government information, public policy and arts administration, and has also worked freelance as a writer and editor. Her involvement with writing and publishing poetry began in the late 1980s, when she was a co-founder of the gay and lesbian imprint Black Wattle Press, and a member of the collective producing *Refractory Girl*, at that stage Australia's longest running feminist magazine. Since then she has been highly active in the Australian literary and poetry scene, and has been regularly involved with writers' groups, editing and publishing journals, and organising literary festivals. With Laurin McKinnon, she co-founded Black Wattle Press, which specialized in gay and lesbian writing. With Judith Beveridge and Louise Wakeling, she edited the poetry anthology *A Parachute of Blue* (1995), and with Michael Farrell, she co-edited *Out of the Box: Contemporary Australian Gay and Lesbian Poets* (2009). She is currently a senior lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide.

Her first book, *The Mask and the Jagged Star*, appeared from the New Zealand publisher Hazard Press in 1992. It was well received in both Australia and New Zealand, winning the Mary Gilmore Award in 1993. She has since published eight poetry collections, including *Screens Jets Heaven: New and Selected Poems*, winner of the Kenneth Slessor Prize in 2003. Often dedicated to exploring and dissecting the identity of contemporary urban Australia, her work regularly appears in leading Australian literary journals and newspapers, and her poems are frequently anthologised. Besides poetry, she is the author of literary and cultural criticism and book reviews, and maintains weblogs including Ruby Street.

Saturday Morning in Ashfield

Fifteen minutes at the autobank, waiting for money,
and the nations stroll by with their children
and the new languages.
So many words for Saturday and shopping,
but only one word for money,
inscribed on plastic and the machine intones.
Your name's numeric, pretending it's the universal language,
but the footpaths show out the differences,
such as clothes and their colour, the number of children,
(oh, and eyes, hair and skin).
It's a weekly celebration despite government green papers,
talkback radio and letters to the editor.
It's inevitable like the violence,
and the bearing and raising of all these children
who are not getting back on any boats
because they were born just round the corner.
And it's nobody else's business
on a free winter's day cut with sun,
crowned with the beautiful hard antipodean blue.
But it doesn't seem so hard today
to love all that ordinary, forgotten suburban ritual
that could make this Saturday exciting.

Woke up this morning in the crystal shop

Curious about this shop's cosmic crystals,
hacked out of the earth's crust for profit,
I wanted only to turn them round in the sun
for beauty's sake but the price tag blocked the light.

I think I must have turned to go,
then stopped, surprised.

Instead of the tinkle, jingle morning music,
new age soporific, floating through incense,
there was the jangle, sliding,
sweet home Elmore James,
bluesing over the sweetness with gritted energy—
the rock and cracked crystalline heartbreak,
granite tough twelve-bar necessity,
of pushing on even while the sky is crying.

So, growling like a dog, I walked into the dirty street,
cos, I woke up this morning,
I believe I'll dust my blues

Somewhere that summer

This is somewhere above the sea,
a crack in the cliffs
that gather the booming winds.
Shaken by big tides,
our borrowed window is painted
with salt flowers of weather.
All summer we've worked
at rest.

You found a thin girl
and entertained
too many thoughts we name
forbidden. They danced
as thoughts do, on the beach
between a wish and the horizon
till she went, hiking over the hill
to the flat station where the mail train
twice a week rattles through
the old cutting.

My paint had a bloom of despair
until January. Ideas curdled
in lead tubes until the heat
made them rupture.
I even painted your longing
as if it were an explosion
of orange light though I know
you only spoke of blue,
in her eyes and spread before us.

The rest of summer you walked
and cooked, never broke
the spines of books, not once
defiled clean sheets of paper.
I preferred it when you sang
the evening in from the sea,
nurtured oil and scattered
vegetables into a lilting feast
that absorbed our nights.

Then you said one day
you were waiting
for the sound of brakes,
as metal resists metal
and impossible journeys continue.

When Planets Softly Collide

This is not a poem about dust,
there have been too many of those,
but may be about wind, who knows,
the remaking of deserts, endlessly,
when sand becomes a definition
of scale or boundaries or change
like weather squeezing out lines of heat
that drives from solid midnight freeze
up into the sweat pressure of midday.
These conditions are inescapable, no relief —
still there are flowers, stubborn and pink.

Yesterday, strangely, began with showers,
laying the heat demons down and out
for a moment and the air, wet
with the ghost of something old.
Whispers like clouds of aimless particles
which one day could form something solid,
whispers and the slight reverberation
of planets softly colliding,
showering each other with dust,
which they have been trying to avoid,
hoping for a poem about something greener.

As if rock didn't survive,
and dust didn't dance on air.

Memory wasn't necessary. Once

Sometimes it gets you, the radio.
Those nights when the heat is silk,
and you could shed in the dark
all your careful covers and imagine
there's someone waiting in the garden,
arguing over the telephone line,
at the abrupt ending of a dream.
Those guitars thud and jangle,
and a rhythm seems to shiver
and float like a memory, that skin
you remember, the sweat
of a long night like this,
when the damned radio plays
Sweet Sweet Love. And once,
then, you weren't reminiscing,
once memory wasn't necessary.

Misinterpretations /or The Dark Grey Outline

I move through a slanting,
footpaths erupting roots through bricks
near the mad old bus stop.
I used to know what I was thinking,
now it's a field, inside,
is it green, or grey water, horsing,
gridding,
heavens bent
through the fleck.
Sometimes I wonder if I'm drinking the wrong water,
the other day I read
I had a sort of degree, but I ain't, no way *Hose-Bloody-Zay*.
Please, I-am-not-a-doctor,
I'm too unfashionable for that.

Even in Sydney when days get cuter
than cop cars, as the city train smells of its electricity
and cut-up vinyl,
makes you want to chisel rocks with letters,
makes you think, placing As while breathing
Hawkesbury sandstone,
oh gritty gritty something,
don't let go.

But from Greenhill Road I can see a Dark Grey Outline,
gums on the Toorak Gardens horizon
after rain pins on Portrush,
windy,
juggle juggle,
that's the bus tyres.
Tickets are eaten,
baskets savaged, cars dinking in line.
It seems average but sounds pushy
out the window,
my eyes scam down choosing the wet leaf
blown onto a white roundabout.
Something I learned when I was young,
shape is serious matter.
I am not what I'm supposed to be.
Light is spring silver
and escapes my language,
in the next lane
'fragile goods'.

Outside a North Terrace carpark
is the The Ha-Ha Arrow,
pointing white blue charge grips,

tinker tinker bus blows money,
odd jangles of student housing,
arrivals not quite fusion (Go Backwards).

The second lift won't stop
at the fifth floor,
'it's worth reporting'. What, corridors?
In here, it's ice white as carpet,
closing time.
If you don't approve,
or burn, 'therefore'.
Perhaps I am Missing Pages Out Of My Life.
I've always been flaky, lost and shaky,
but never 'ponderous' over my territory,
that takes planning.
It's always been weather not
geosophy (that's so fashionable! yeah?).
I'm delicate, sandy,
unknown, please, or 'to not know',
falling without finding.

But what am I thinking, of giving up the desk,
going off-road, gravelling, dirt thrash?
Why not, given the green's mixed up,
weather rattled, promises running off
leaves as prediction pouring through vents.

The creeks are high,
snake tongues, feathers,
water calls, absolutely
and briefly,
tomorrow forks
but for now
full cold moon
and wrestling night.

I have dreamed green tiles,
walls, gaps, dirty grassy
penalty signs,
curves, yes, finally,
pink ankle
and all this air, all this.

If I'm not what I'm supposed to be
then why all this certainty,
how do I escape its cackling old *Sprache*?

Night in Frome Road
is there at its hour,
cold erupting through asphalt,
sight and feeling mashed with

my flaking alphabets.

2011

Mozart walking by

I push my eyes out of the window,
the glass is warped, my astigmatism
ripples the world.

A still world can make you dizzy.

The blood vessels in my eyes
look crazy—this dry winter

I've tried to rub up tears
to run my sight.

In these ripples are the ghosts,
the ones who've bent time.

It would come as no surprise
to see Mozart walking by this day,
full of light, stepping out, *allegro*.

Makes me think of starfish,
pools like deep windows.

I want to dive, know the fear,
and the water's cold.

That's the dance, its danger.

The body warps and dies,
but today it fills with light,
unasked, short-lived.

The cat on the fence
doesn't question, it stretches
and turns, gathering heat.

Mozart strokes its head and walks on
whistling, *allegro vivace*.

Writing her big sleep

Three screams, the climax outside of gunshot.
The pen goes cold as metal in winter.
Ten years ago she had been drowsing through
The Big Sleep and woke up to a dead man.

And it's happening again, outside the screen's
blue flame—this time a flat dead glow
covers up the page's distress.

Private investigator now she rises
from the couch, feet like steps in the street.
Will they find her upper storey, gun blasts
through the chipboard door?

The body back then, a male furnace
burning on high even at rest, a little twitch
at the ears but blinded in half-sleep, room-dark.
'Why do they keep going back to the house?'

He didn't see the gilt exotica extrapolated from black
and white, Laurel Canyon strange enough.
But his question out of dream—a sleek shiny car
dragged up from the edge of the pier,
black telephones, two a.m.—was his last.

'What's wrong with you?' he was supposed to say.
'Nothing you can't fix,' she's to reply. All her life,
waiting to mouth the second half of the double act, but
waking up, a dead man and smell of damp corruption,
cordite, sweet exotics, lonely refrigerators.

Outside, the street's a giant answer.
Everything's wrong now with cigarettes
and sex, loneliness still long-distance but defensible.

Except her window bars sing, sirens swarm, a body
slumps out there, past her door. No wonder
a woman's screaming, how can that be ignored?

And the pen silent, near frozen in blue.

Songs of the evening air

les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir
—Charles Baudelaire

Sounds and fragrances blend in evening air.
The lines of buildings, curves of roads
and trees also have songs breathed out,
waves of leaves, exhaust, sweet jasmine.
A thick air of cooking clings
round the blunt blades of picket fences,
its solid note tangles with the screech—
a child's bike and the pothole,
brittle edge of mother's voice, pitching
what she can, a register narrowed
by temper and hard care.

The lines of buildings, crescendo of stairs,
swell the argument in Arabic on the landing.
Men comment below, potbellies near bursting,
scorn the foreign wave of chanted words.
They say *she gives it to him every day*,
what's trapped inside them, useless hurt,
the sound of spit hitting concrete,
thick air of exhaust, sweet jasmine.
A laminex thud, spoons, knives, glass—
a medley swings out into the cool
dark, shadows sway, rich in layers.

A single candle in a front room
ripples an arpeggio on curtains and glass.
Breathed out, a wish for pleasure as dark
on dark blanket covers a source of pain.
Glossy street-light swims in a blur, opposites
collide or move past each other,
slippage like jazz or plate tectonics.
A white cat tremors a moment,
flicks a tail round the corner,
between lines of buildings, the pitch of leaves.
A woman's face presses out from a window.

Gears slip, teeth metal tyres on glass,
familiar rust of gates, old songs of iron—
one day someone will make it new again.
Hunched in coat and collar a man balances
two large paper bags, weighted with beer
and dinner—oil, fenugreek, chilli and hops—
amber comforts, old songs, the football replay.
He grasps the parcels tight and swears.

Nosing shadows a dog sniffs the fence,
pisses, jogs on through air that tells him
more about the night than human syllables.
As dogs do, humans do
what they can—
fiddling the catch of the gate.

The sweet life of midnight

There's an edge off the moon tonight—
whatever's alive on the streets moves carefully,
bound to bitumen and the crunch of glass,
past plastic bags curled up in silence
or scattered like a giant statement,
challenging the dogs of the neighbourhood.
Cars are swifter than midnight through
dozens of suburbs before they reach home.

But there's rain sitting in the clouds
under the moon, waiting to give relief
to the streets, dogs and cats, travellers
who are not tucked up tight. Who might
see this bright rock above, floating,
nearly full but loosed from completeness
as midnight drifts before the weekend
or a storm hesitates before it falls out of heaven.

The streets are clear of sweat, stir and traffic,
and the life of strays and debris takes over.
And even those who skate smoothly
over humps and potholes, seeking further
than these surroundings, are aware of another
life lit by this moon, minus just one edge,
shining down on other edges. They've grown
out of the dark into a sweeter life of midnight.

In deep, down past sleep

The way you turn at night toward me,
so I take your breath across my face, then
away. And I breathe you, back bare
as a beautiful open country, pale surface
for my lung's warm wave to draw as my pen,
like words that don't dream but stir.
I turn, the roll of sleep and feel you
reach me. And you are deep behind,
down past sleep, with the warm wells
of our nights, fluid as blood, rough as water.
And you wash in the sea that boils
under the arch of the bridge which meets
over us, a cry of skin utters
the wordless yes. And you in deep behind,
your sleeping arm curls over the spread
of my shoulder. I'm crossed by breath,
opened with skin, and firmly rooted
with the strength of your waking arm.
Under my spreading banks, you push
my full tide.
The way you turn at night,
deep behind, down past sleep.

İ. O.

b. 1951

İ. O. (or Pi O, born 1951) is an Australian, working class, anarchist, poet of Greek origin.

Born in Katerini, Greece, İ. O. came to Australia with his family around 1954. After time in Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre, the family moved to the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy.

İ. O. was inspired to start writing poetry in 1970 when he heard Johnny Cash reciting (religious) poetry while tuning his guitar. İ. O. thought he could do as well or better. His work ranges from standup-type rants to 'conceptual' page poetry and concrete poetry, with a heavy emphasis on wordplay and capturing the vitality of everyday speech. Thematically, he commonly portrays the issues of non-Anglo-Celtic working class life.

He has had numerous books published since his first, *Fitzroy Brothel* in 1974, more notably the epic verse novel *24hrs*. From 1978 to 1983, he was involved in producing the radical poetry magazine 925. He is a fixture of Melbourne's performance poetry scene and has edited an anthology of performance poetry (*Off the Record*) for Penguin. His most recent book is *Big Numbers: New and Selected Poems* (2008).

him

him punch him
him punch him too him hit him
him hit him 2, 3, 4,...

“Yoo no hit him!”
him hit

“Liv him alon wil-yum!”
him hit him more

“Eye punch yoo on noz!”
him punch him in stomaak
him kik him in lek
him skrech him in face

“Gon to Hospitaal!”
“Gon to Hospitaal!”

him en him
gon to Hospitaal.

Terribleness

The mad rush to move information from the margins (of society) to the centers (of power) are predominantly done through numbers now. Once, we knew how to manipulate most if not all the numbers we needed, cos they were relatively small. We use functions like $\times$, $\div$, $+$, $-$, etc, then more complex functions such as integration, logs, slide-rules, hand-calculators, and finally computers. The end result seems to be that we have become increasingly disenfranchised from the seats of power and influence. To navigate our way through the complex labyrinth of numbers we mortals need sign-posts and monuments to help us recognize our location. Examples of such numbers are, "e", "i", and "pi". These "symbols" short-cut the writing-out of all the digits in their proper order and allowed us to move and manipulate them as units or aggregates of quanta. So what do we call a number that is so large and complex it is impossible to find a formula for its sequence of digits? Writing out all the digits each time you want to refer to it seems inadequate and inefficient to us (if not to a computer (or another storage) technology). So do we let the number-crunching power of the computer do all the work, or do we invent our own strategies that can help us "own" those large numbers? If computers are good at holding-numbers, and we are good at being emotional then perhaps an ability to hold the digits of an array in an emotional complex that we (if not the computer) can read, will hold us in good stead. Perhaps the rise of numerology in ancient Greece was directly related to a complex society that was an emotional turmoil; paralleling our own culture directly. Can the digits of a number be held as an emotional complex of sorts, and is thinking in itself an emotional act?

Can an emotion like a hologram regurgitate the sequence of digits in an array or number, and if so how? A formalist would state unequivocally that "7" is neither luck nor unlucky, whilst a sociologist could point out that it is the number "8" in many Asian cultures that is lucky not "7". Perhaps it is the exactitude of mathematics that will in time be under siege, and not the emotions.

What does it mean for Smarandache to draw an array in the shape of a car? It is a number to be sure, and perhaps the number "4" in the array is significant cos a car has "4" wheels, and the "1" is a unit meaning only "1" car is involved whilst the "2" represents the number of headlights the car has, but what of the "noughts" INSIDE the car? Or for that matter outside it. Smarandache tells us that the zeroes outside the car indicate that the number is "finite". Perhaps the zeroes in the car mean no-one can or is driving it. If we presume that this "number" can be called "Car" then what does it mean to multiply it with a number called "Lattice"

What pattern does it assume? What happens if we subtract it, or divide them together? I don't know cos I haven't got a big enough calculator to do it with. Whatever the result the new number would assume a "complex", in much the same way as a vocabulary held together by a grammar results in a new number (or thought or word, to stay with the analogy). But is the resulting pattern significant (visually)? Perhaps not. But what if (visually) it turns out to look like a birthday cake (say), what then? $\text{Car} \times \text{Lattice} = \text{Cake}????$ It may of course be irrelevant or unrelated to mathematics proper, but what is mathematics proper? Perhaps it is poetry only. This "terribleness" as Smarandache would say is what attracts me, and like him "Working simultaneously with literature and mathematics, I feel like a man who knows two languages"

McDonald's Cheesburgers

-the meat-

has a high fat content

-the lettuce-

12 chemicals to keep it "crisp!"

-the cheese-

3 x 3 yellow lino

-the pickles-

loaded: polysorbate 80

-the bun-

a 13% sugar loading

McDonald's isn't food it's propaganda

DON WALKER

b. 1951

Don Walker (born 29 November 1951) is an Australian musician and songwriter known for writing many of the hits for Australian pub rock band Cold Chisel. He played piano and keyboard with the band from 1973 to 1983, when they disbanded. He has since continued to record and tour, both solo and with Tex, Don and Charlie, and worked as a song-writer for others. In 2009, he released his first book.

Richard Clapton describes Walker as, "the most Australian writer there has ever been. Don just digs being a sort of Beat poet, who goes around observing, especially around the streets of Kings Cross. He soaks it up like a sponge and articulates it so well. Quite frankly, I think he's better than the rest of us."

Walker is considered to be one of Australia's best songwriters. In 2012 he was inducted into the Australian Songwriter's Hall of Fame.

Donald Hugh Walker was born in Ayr North Queensland to a farmer father and schoolteacher mother. He lived on a cane farm his father owned on Rita Island on the Burdekin River until the age of 4. His family later moved to Grafton, where a local piano teacher taught him, "a little bit of Chopin.....a lot of Fats Waller repertoire, and also Winifred Atwell." Later, he, "got into organ and the main influences were Stevie Winwood's 60s stuff and Ray Manzarek."

Having completed a degree in physics in the 70s, Walker was working for the Weapons Research Establishment, modelling airflow for F-111s, when he formed Cold Chisel.

Walker moved to Kings Cross in Sydney in 1976, and stayed there for three decades. Local landmarks are mentioned in many of his songs.

From the earliest days Walker was the creative songwriting force for Cold Chisel. He became known for his passionate and raw lyrical observations on the Australian society and culture of the time. His songwriting credits include the hit singles "Flame Trees," "Saturday Night," "Choirgirl," (a teary ballad about abortion) "Breakfast At Sweethearts," "Cheap Wine," and the Australian Vietnam war song "Khe Sanh" (voted the 8th greatest Australian song of all time by the Australian Performing Rights Association in 2001). Many of these songs still receive airplay on Australian radio to this day and have become ingrained in Australian music culture.

During his time with Cold Chisel he produced his first work outside the band, the soundtrack to the Australian movie "Freedom", directed by Scott Hicks. The soundtrack was released as an album and featured members of Cold Chisel and Michael Hutchence. The Age described it as, "the best rock music written for an Australian movie."

After Cold Chisel disbanded in 1983, Walker had a five year hiatus before resuming recording and performing using the name "Catfish." Ostensibly a band, Catfish was in effect a solo project, featuring Walker on vocals, keyboards and penning all the songs. Catfish featured various backing musicians, such as Charlie Owen, Ian Moss, Ricky Fataar and harmonica player David Blight. Performing as a singer live for the first time, Walker recalled it initially being, "so hard I had to get half-happy on alcohol to manage it."

The first album, Unlimited Address, released in 1989, showed a jazzier, Eastern European side to Walker's songwriting, reflecting his travels during the previous

years. Despite being critically lauded, sales were moderate, the album reaching number 49 in the national charts. The next album, "Ruby," was a return to Australia in sound and lyrical subject matter. Again, it was well received by critics but sold relatively poorly. The track "Charleville" was later to receive country music awards when covered by Slim Dusty.

In early 1992 Don performed an acoustic live performance for alternative radio station JJJ with Charlie Owen, James Cruickshank and Tex Perkins. In 1993 Tex, Don and Charlie released their first album, "Sad but True" on Red Eye Records. The record, an acoustic country-tinged affair, returned Walker to some level of popular awareness and received rave reviews in magazines like Australian Rolling Stone. About half the songs were written by Walker, including "Sitting in a Bar." The band toured strongly on the back of the album, later releasing a live album "Monday Morning Coming Down," featuring tracks from "Sad But True" plus some covers of standards. Walker says, "There are recording warts that are all over every record but most producers clean them off; we love 'em so we leave 'em."

2005 saw the release of a third Tex, Don and Charlie album, "All is Forgiven," similar in style to the first. Again, Walker wrote about half the songs, including "Harry was a Bad Bugger", described by Chris Johnston as, "the Australian song of the year." The album was shortlisted for the inaugural Australian Music Prize.

1994 was the year of Walker's first full release under his own name, "We're All Gunna Die." He stated that it was the first album to carry his name as, "it was the first record that finished up how I wanted it." It was recorded almost live in the studio over a period of 4 days with a band featuring David Blight, Garrett Costigan on pedal-steel guitar and Red Rivers on guitar. The music is a ragged mix of country, Chicago blues and balladry, and features the song "Eternity." It would be another 12 years before Walker was to produce another solo recording, the well-received "Cutting Back." From 2005 to 2012 he toured Australia occasionally with his backing band, the Suave Fucks.

Walker published his first book, *Shots*, in 2009. It was an autobiographical collection of smaller pieces, rarely more than a few pages in length. The subject matter was mostly recollections of rural Australia or life with Cold Chisel before they became widely famous. A separate piece by Walker had previously been included in *The Best Australian Essays* collection for 2007.

Shots received a number of positive reviews: *The Age* described the memoir as "a whip crack across a landscape of rural Australia, lonely highways and endless gigs;" in the *Australian Book Review* it was called "a quite wonderful book [that] blasts away every last vestige of the crude, boozy, foot-stomping, flag-waving Australiana that has until now enveloped the Cold Chisel story like a filthy smog, leaving behind only the simmering highways, the trashy motels, the dank pubs and the monotonous suburbs of a nation slouching apathetically through the remnants of the 20th century." Readings from *Shots*, as performed by Walker, were aired on Radio National throughout late 2009.

Live in Queenscliff, Walker's first live album, was given a digital-only release in early 2011. It features a performance with the Suave Fucks at the 2006 Queenscliff Music Festival.

Walker has worked with many other artists, most notably with song writing credits on Ian Moss' hit album, "Matchbook" and Jimmy Barnes' single "Stone Cold." He has written with or had songs recorded by TOFOG, Jimmy Little, Slim Dusty, Kate Ceberano, Wendy Matthews, Troy Cassar-Daley, Graeme Connors, Anne Kirkpatrick, Mick Harvey, Melinda Schneider, Katie Noonan, Jeff Lang, Normie Rowe and Adam Brand. He also produced Moss' album "Petrolhead."

He is the brother of the Australian novelist, Brenda Walker and son of Australian novelist Shirley Walker. He is a Brisbane Broncos supporter.

Khe Sanh

I left my heart to the sappers round Khe Sanh,
And my soul was sold with my cigarettes to the blackmarket man.
I've had the Vietnam cold turkey
From the ocean to the Silver City,
And it's only other vets could understand

About the long forgotten dockside guarantees,
How there were no V-day heroes in 1973,
How we sailed into Sydney Harbour
Saw an old friend but couldn't kiss her.
She was lined, and I was home to the lucky land.

And she was like so many more from that time on,
Their lives were all so empty, till they found their chosen one,
And their legs were often open
But their minds were always closed
And their hearts were held in fast suburban chains;
And the legal pads were yellow, hours long, paypacket lean,
And the telex writers clattered where the gunships once had been,
But the car parks made me jumpy
And I never stopped the dreams
Or the growing need for speed and novacaine.

So I worked across the country end to end,
Tried to find a place to settle down, where my mixed up life could mend,
Held a job on an oil-rig
Flying choppers when I could,
But the nightlife nearly drove me round the bend.

And I've travelled round the world from year to year,
And each one found me aimless, one more year the more for wear,
And I've been back to South East Asia
But the answer sure ain't there,
But I'm drifting north, to check things out again.

You know the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
Only seven flying hours, and I'll be landing in Hong Kong.
There ain't nothing like the kisses
From a jaded Chinese princess,
I'm gonna hit some Hong Kong mattress all night long.

Well the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
Yeah the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
And it's really got me worried,
I'm goin' nowhere and I'm in a hurry,
And the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone.

Choir Girl

Looking like a choirgirl,
She's crying like a refugee.
Looking like a choirgirl,
She's crying like a refugee.
One nurse to hold her,
One nurse to wheel her down the corridors of healing,
Well I've been trying,
But she's crying like a refugee.

Loves me like a sister,
Loves me like an only child.
Loves me like a sister,
She loves me like an only child.
She's my connection,
I'll hold on
And never, never, never let her down
'Cause she's alone,
And she loves me like an only child.

Suffer little children,
Send that little child to me,
All day the doctor
Handles his responsibility.

Looking like a choirgirl,
Crying like a refugee,
Looking like a choirgirl,
Crying like a refugee.
She's my connection, yeah,
I'll hold on
And never, never, never let her down,
'Cause she's alone,
And she's crying like a refugee.

Cheap Wine

Once I smoked a Danneman cigar,
Drove a foreign car;
Baby that was years ago,
I left it all behind.
Had a friend, I heard she died,
On a needle she was crucified;
Baby that was years ago,
I left it all behind for my
Cheap wine and a three-day growth,
Cheap wine and a three-day growth,
Come on!

I don't mind takin' charity
From those that I despise;
I don't really need your love.
Baby you can shout at me
But you can't meet my eyes,
I don't really need your love, I got my
Cheap wine and a three-day growth,
Cheap wine and a three-day growth,
Come on!

Sitting on the beach drinkin' rocket fuels, oh yeah!
Spent the whole night breakin' all the rules, oh yeah!
Mending every minute of the day before,
Watching the ocean, watching the shore,
Watching the sunrise, and thinkin' there could never be more,
Never be more!
Anytime you want to find me
I ain't got a telephone,
I'm another world away,
But I always feel at home, with my
Cheap wine and a three-day growth ...

Flame Trees

Kids out driving Saturday afternoon pass me by,
I'm just savouring familiar sights.
We share some history, this town and I,
And I can't stop that long forgotten feeling of her.
Try to book a room to stay tonight.

Number one is to find some friends to say "You're doing well,
After all this time you boys look just the same!"
Number two is the happy hour at one of two hotels,
Settle in to play "Do you remember so and so?"
Number three is never say her name!

Oh the flame trees will blind the weary driver,
And there's nothing else could set fire to this town.
There's no change, there's no pace,
Everything within its place,
Just makes it harder to believe that she won't be around.

But, ah, who needs that sentimental bullshit, anyway?
Takes more than just a memory to make me cry!
I'm happy just to sit here round a table with old friends
And see which one of us can tell the biggest lies!

There's a girl falling in love near where the pianola stands
With her young local factory out-of-worker, holding hands,
And I'm wondering if he'll go or if he'll stay!

Do you remember, nothing stopped us on the field
In our day!

Oh the flame trees will blind the weary driver,
And there's nothing else could set fire to this town.
There's no change, there's no pace,
Everything within its place,
Just makes it harder to believe that she won't be around.

Oh the flame trees will blind the weary driver,
And there's nothing else could set fire to this town.
There's no change, there's no pace,
Everything within its place,
Just makes it harder to believe that she won't be around!

The Good Book

Sometime round midnight,
I guess it's sometime round midnight as the crow flies,
As the ceiling fan goes round, and the
Insomnia comes down,
Semis with the hammer down
Hit the bypass round the town,
Reach the highway just outside and
Burn on by.

Memories unshackled come and crawl around my mind.
I need the Good Book,
I need the word to turn my gasoline to wine.

I hold the key,
Yeah, I hold the key to where I lie.
I own the suitcase full of snapshots by the door.
I own the bottle by the bedside,
The boot heels on the floor.
I read the future in the coal that hangs forgotten in my fingers
And flares above my face for every scattered soul that hungers
In disconnected, never-mattered places just like this.
I own the wind outside,
Bashing, bashing on the motel sign.
I need the Good Book,
I need the word to turn my gasoline to wine.

And I could love just about anything
That paid me back in kind.
I need the Good Book,
I need the word to turn my gasoline to wine.

Everybody

Everybody wants to be a wannabe
Living in a limousine.
Everybody wants to be a tragedy
In a supermarket magazine.
Everybody wants to be famous,
Everybody wants more things,
Everybody longs to feel the pain
That a whole lotta money's gonna bring.
Everybody wants their name on the guest list,
Everybody wants to get in free.
Everybody wants complete fidelity
From two or three lovers simultaneously.
Everybody wants to be an individual,
Everybody else does too.
All I wanna be is idiot free
And outta here with you.
Everybody wants to have children,
No-one wants to hang around.
Everybody wants the world to cry
When they're lying in the cold cold ground.
Everybody wants the ideal body
Waiting when they get back home,
Whether that's the one in Shanghai, London,
New York City or the villa in Rome.
Everybody wants to be an individual,
Everybody else does too.
All I wanna be is idiot free
And outta here with you.
Everybody thinks they might have been kidnapped
And examined in a U.F.O.
Everybody's locked into too much hock
To ever think about what they don't want you to know.
And still they're gunna be an individual,
Everybody else is too.
All I wanna be is idiot free
And outta here with you.

Get Along

Headin' down the highway,
An' I'm thinkin' about my girl,
Tryin' to find a station with a song;
They estimate there's 6 billion people in this world,
And I spend my time wondering how
the other 5 billion, 9 hundred 99 million,
9 hundred an' 99 thousand, 9 hundred an' 99
get along, get along.

Gotta find a station that can take me away
To where I wanna be before I'm gone,
To the little house above the beach,
For I might buy one day,
And there will be me an' that girl,
Sittin' there watchin' the big ships on the horizon,
Stocked up for whenever her children,
Wanna drop by, for a while.

Get along.
Don't try to flank it
Blind side of the dog,
I'm eyeball deep an' all's asleep,
I never got to log,
It's saying you're not, but know I'm not.
The only one out here,
I drop her down a cog,
Gotta paint the diesel,
Pay the banks an' stay alive,
Got away in Leeton,
Just fill the tanks and drive.

Headin' down the highway,
An' I'm thinkin' about my girl,
Tryin' to find a station with a song,
Estimate there's 6 billion people in this world,
And I spend my time wondering how
the other 5 billion, 9 hundred 99 million,
9 hundred an' 99 thousand, 9 hundred an' 99
Get along, get along.

Get along!

KEVIN HART

b. 1954

Kevin Hart is a prodigious figure on the international intellectual landscape. His award-winning poetry, collected in eleven collections and chapbooks of poetry dating back to 1978, is matched by his output as an internationally recognized critic and philosopher. He has published highly respected studies of Jacques Derrida, Samuel Johnson and most recently French literary critic and philosopher Maurice Blanchot. Having taught in Australia for years, in 2001 Hart left to take up a chair in English Literature at Notre Dame University. His departure was a great loss for the intellectual life of Australia. Nevertheless, Hart's most recent collection *Flame Tree* returns to Australia, inhabiting the heat of Brisbane, the borderless regions of the deserts, and the inner-city life of Melbourne.

Kevin Hart's poetry is a rare gift. Bringing together deep contemplation and worldly experience, an ability to give the self up to the unknowable coupled with a rigorous engagement with the abstract and spiritual. It is a bold song singing the open heart and open mind. Hart's poetry is lucid and accessible while giving voice to rich depths where mystery and being coalesce. It approaches the unapproachable, the impossible borders of experience, through praise and song, and sets the everyday experience of the real world in close proximity to a deeper world of spirit.

Among his earlier works, one of the poems presented here, 'The Room', exemplifies the careful balance Hart achieves between mystery and the real. The house, the extraneous noise of the cricket's grief, the prayer, peace and sleep of the poem, close around the closed room, bearing witness to the unrepresentable presence at the centre of the poems and house alike. The room is given as essential and unknowable, a mystery at the centre of things, which defies the ownership so clearly stated in the first line, and displaces the speaker.

It is difficult, knowing Hart's long study into phenomenology, not to draw from the development of the image of the house a resonance with Heidegger's dictum that "language is the house of Being", and so perhaps to trace a path to the notion that the living and language share this central abiding mystery; that at the centre of each absence dwells, defying and denying ownership, property, and mastery. It is a mystery that haunts being and language equally, that dispossesses us, that waits, closed, as a promise and a threat, a blessing and a wound. There is an interesting note to this poem. Several years after its first publication, Hart received a letter from a South American thanking him for the poem. In the letter the man stated that 'The Room' had sustained the man during a period of several months' detention and torture at the hands of the local military. It seems that there is no knowing where language will lead, what will be saved by words or how a poem is to be read. It is difficult to estimate the political charge of a poem, its possible impact outside of the context, the world in which it originated.

Harold Bloom stated on the publication of *Flame Tree*, "Kevin Hart is one of the major living poets of the English language . . . he is a visionary of desire and its limits." Hart's poetry is a song given to common human experiences of love and mourning, the fullness, both human and spiritual, of being in the world. It is not limited by national or temporal boundaries, it is a part of a larger song – that sung by Bonnefoy or St John of the Cross, Hölderlin or the Torah – that stretches back

and forth through the experience and literature of the worlds we inhabit within this world.

My Name

There is a silence words can't touch.
There is.
And there's a name inside my name
Though one my mother never said out loud

She never said it, never once, although
She knew there was another name
That sleeps inside my name

*Sleep now, old name,
For no one wants to know of you*

My mother, she is dead these dozen years
And she is grown so small
She sleeps inside my name when it is said

I think she sleeps
Within that other name as well, more deeply, far
More quietly, turning only once or twice
Inside that paradise

*Sleep now, old love,
It is too late to say a word to you*

Summer

A trip to the corner shop will take all day
But what the fuck: you need a can of Coke.
You see the air is wrinkled like your shirt
And feel at home

With those young blokes all lounging round with beer
And a TV just chirping with the cricket,
Then there's the guy who teaches something French
Hosing his car,

And the youngish wife outside with her long legs
And her big husband off in Singapore
For what must be his second month up there
Doing software:

There's more to say, you know, about the booze,
The crying in the backyard late at night,
About the smell of thunder in the dark
And that walk back.

The River

There is a radiance inside the winter woods
That calls each soul by name:
Wind in young boughs, trees shaking off thick coats of snow,

The rattle of frozen rain on a barn roof: all these
Will help you lose your way
And find a silence older than the sky

That makes our being here a murmur only,
That makes me walk along the river
Beyond where it has flooded itself

While freezing over, past these dead firs,
The great assembly of cedars,
So that I must say, *I do not know why I am here,*

And move around in those few words
And feel their many needles
Upon my lips and warm them on my tongue

Though I say nothing, for it is a calm
Beyond the calm I know
That wants to talk now, after all these years

Of hearing me say *spruce, wind, cloud and face,*
Not knowing the first thing about them all,
Not knowing the simplest thing,

That every word said well is praise:
And someone deep inside me wants to say
I am not lost but there are many paths!

While someone else will whisper back,
So you are on the longest quest of all,
The quest for home, and not appear

Though I have walked along the river now
These good five miles
While letting wind push me a little way

And letting thoughts grow slow and weak
Before I feed them words, for what
Is told to me this afternoon

Is simply *river* , with each *I* and *it* dissolved,
A cold truth but a truth indeed
Held tight on the way back

Past curves and forks, as evening takes hold,
A strange light all the way
That falls between the words that I would use

When talking of this strangeness or this light
So that I speak in small, slow breaths
Of evening, cedar, cone and ice

In words that stick to skin –

Three Poems From *Dark Retreat*

Dark One, it is the summer now: the evenings feel
Beneath my shirt, and it is good.
The trees, they sway a little when they get high,
And higher still the nests and stars are quiet.

Those wasps my children fear
Are tight in their mud house, near lax electric wires,
And those two girls, dipped in a humid day,
Are deepening in sleep;

And I am left alone
With you inside those wild electric wires out there
And playing with my half-unbuttoned shirt
And growing in those shady leaves

And in a black and yellow summer sting

A single word can darken the widest room
Even in summer: glass all through my bread
For year on year

Yet I would give
This sunburned air for just one word,
Dark One,

Even a word that filled my mouth with blood;

But you keep quiet,
Just hiding there, behind my death,
For year on year

Your voice—
I would give up this champagne light

To know it just once more,
Even if sheathed in a sparrow's song,

A flash
Of a sparrow's outstretched wings,

Or the memory of that sparrow
That smashed into my windowpane
In a black storm

Untuned Spring: the young grass flirts
With stringy weeds; the tanagers
Sing with a splash of Spanish; wind
Saves gobs of old man snow in shade.

Between big awkward chords, I push
Stiff windows high, tack on new screens,
And taste this sweet old thing: chill air
That's brushed some baby leaves of oak.

You're here as well, Dark One, so where's
Your hidey hole? The kettle's hiss,
My daughter's drawing of our cat,
That crumbling wasp nest by the door?

Nights

At times my name gets tired of me
And wanders off into the dark:
Some times it claws me with a bark
Some times it leaves me almost free

And then I cannot see a thing
And flesh is barely tied to soul:
Those nights the density of coal
Those nights when I am not a king

Then hours bunch up to watch me fall
And I am turned into a prayer:
Some nights I circle God's dark lair
Some nights an endless night is all

DOROTHY PORTER

1954 – 2008

Dorothy Porter was born in Sydney on 26 March 1954. She attended Queenwood School for Girls before going to the University of Sydney, graduating in 1975 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in English and History. She then completed a Diploma of Education at the Sydney Teachers' College. Afterwards she worked on an Israeli kibbutz, as a bus conductor on the Sydney buses, and taught creative writing in schools, prisons and community workshops. She also lectured part-time in Poetry and Writing at the University of Technology, Sydney, before moving to Melbourne in 1993 to live with her partner, novelist Andrea Goldsmith. She died there on 10 December 2008 following a recurrence of breast cancer.

Porter's first collection *Little Hoodlum* (1975) immediately signalled the arrival of a new and highly individual voice on the Australian poetry scene, with her stress on such topics as sensuality, risk-taking and, at times, violence. It was with her five verse novels, however, beginning with the historically-based *Akhenaten* (1992), told as a series of dramatic monologues by the Egyptian pharaoh of that name, that Porter made her most distinctive contribution to Australian literature. Determined to prove that poetry could attract readers, she combined a detective story plot with racy verse and satire of the local poetry scene in *The Monkey's Mask* (1994), to notable success. *The Monkey's Mask* won both the National Book Council's Banjo Awards, Turnbull Fox Phillips Poetry Prize and The Age Book of the Year Award, Dinny O'Hearn Poetry Prize. It was also adapted for the stage and for a feature film released in 2000. *What a Piece of Work* (1999) is a darker piece told from the perspective of a psychiatrist at Sydney's Callan Park Mental Hospital where noted poet Francis Webb is one of the patients. In *Wild Surmise* (2002), Porter used a double perspective, alternating between a woman astronomer as she seeks both new galaxies and her lesbian lover and her dying academic husband, who finds consolation in literature. *Wild Surmise* won both the John Bray Poetry Award and the Premier's Award for Best Overall Published work in the South Australian Festival Awards for Literature in 2004. *El Dorado* (2007) is a thriller set in Melbourne dealing with a serial killer who targets children. Two posthumous collections have appeared. *The Bee Hut* (2009) includes poems written in the last five years of Porter's life, a number of which deal with her battle with cancer. *Love Poems* (2010) has a preface by Andrea Goldsmith and includes 125 of Porter's most powerful love poems, selected from those published during her career.

Porter also collaborated with composer Jonathon Mills on *The Ghost Wife*, a musical theatre piece adapted from Barbara Baynton's short story 'The Chosen Vessel', and an opera, *The Eternity Man*, based on the life of Edgar Stace, a Sydney man who, for decades, chalked the word 'Eternity' around Sydney. This was filmed in 2006 and later shown on ABC television. At the time of her death, Porter was working on the libretto for a rock opera, *January*, with musician Tim Finn.

The work of Dorothy Porter, one of Australia's most popular and most read poets, both in Australia and abroad, is fuelled by a lusty, human humour and a generously sharp-tongued spirit. She grew up in Sydney and the Blue Mountains,

living later in Melbourne, and published seven collections of poetry; two novels for young adults, two librettos for operas performed in Sydney, Melbourne and London; and four verse-novels. She has received numerous awards for her work, including The Age Book of the Year Award and the National Book Council Award (Poetry) for *The Monkey's Mask*, and the FAW Christopher Brennan Award for Poetry in 2001.

Porter's writing ranges across lyrical poetry, the verse-novel, opera libretto and children's fiction. She is best known for her verse-novels which have, more than the work of any other Australian poet, renewed and extended the form in Australian literature while also opening up the world of poetry to a whole new popular readership.

Porter's work couples a lucid grasp of the demotic with deep reading into her poetic forebears (other populists such as Homer, Dante and Brecht spring to mind!). She gives the reader a sensually and intellectually stimulating ride through the crossing of genres, the conflagrations of contemporary sexuality, and the intimate detail of familiar quotidian detail – transformed and resonant with the myths that underwrite a Western understanding of the world. Porter's use of language is often pared back. There is a generosity and sly hard wit to her work that both stimulates and unsettles as it closely examines the selflessness and selfishness people are capable of. Her poetry and verse-novels alike couple intellect with an, at times, raw immersion in sexual energy. Central to all of this is a desire to be read and understood, to follow Dante's example in bringing poetry back to a popular audience. Porter commented:

Looking for an audience. Wanting to be understood by an audience. Was Dante in danger of being shipwrecked on the reef of populist vulgarity? Many of the male Latin scholars of his own day were very dismissive of Dante's writing poetry in the vulgar tongue. Why would any great poet, they argued, care if ordinary people, too stupid or too uneducated or too plain simply DAUNTED, couldn't read his poetry?

Doesn't this ring a few modern bells for us in the contemporary poetry community? Do we care if we're read or not? Are we content, like the Latin scholars of medieval, squabbling Italy, to write within the confines of an exclusive club just for each other? Are we too writing in a 'dead' language?

Porter's work is geared towards a defiant stand against academic, obscurest or life-style/diary-like writing. She believed in and sought to popularize a poetry of open and direct communication, of force and lucidity:

LUCID. What a lovely word. A word that forms a firm shape with the tongue right behind it – but feels full of light and expansion even as one speaks it – or writes it. Its meaning is multifarious – shining, bright, clear, transparent, rational, sane, leading to perception and understanding. For me it is also means a kind of carefully, even lovingly, chosen language where the light shines through – and in. An illumination . . .

Lucidity does not mean the reams of docile looking-out-the-window poetry that seems to be a staple of the Australian poetry diet. The "I am a poet and I will write a poem today" school. Lucidity can write with a tongue of fire. Often it's a sense of urgency, a sense of dire times that can make a poem searingly lucid.

The broader canvas of Porter's verse-novels – rather than being simply extended verse-narratives, or loosely gathered collections of lyrical poems – are fine

examples of the novelistic art, coupling the symbolic charge of poetry with skillful characterization, potent, at times cinematic dialogue and an ever-careful attention to the development of plot. The multi-award winning *The Monkey's Mask* has been adapted for stage, radio and film, and been widely translated and published internationally, making Porter one of Australia's best-known poets internationally. Her most recent verse-novel *Wild Surmise* – a paean to poetry, rich with an aria-like weaving of science, poetry and personal relations – was the first book to win both the South Australian Premier's Award for Literature and Poetry, a clear testament to Porter's skills both as a poet and a novelist.

Judging by her past achievements and her most recent poems, some of which are gathered here and others in the forthcoming *Poems January-August 2004*, Porter's writing continues to set a benchmark in Australian poetry for lucidity, emotive charge and accessibility. As Australian literary-critic Don Anderson once noted, she is Australia's Norman Mailer. Porter is a defiant voice against the obscure and effete in poetry, unafraid to see poetry as a popular art form in the twentieth century, a feast open to all, immersed in the sweat, blood and tears of contemporary life, its hum-drum realities and headlong rush.

© Michael Brennan

The monkey's mask

Trouble

‘Jill’

I challenge the mirror
‘how much guts have you got?’

I like my courage
physical
I like my courage
with a dash of danger.

In between insurance jobs
I've been watching
rock climbers
like game little spiders
on my local cliff

I've got no head for heights
but plenty of stomach
for trouble

trouble
deep other-folks trouble
to spark my engine
and pay my mortgage

and private trouble
oh, pretty trouble

to tidal-wave my bed

I'm waiting

I want you, trouble,
on the rocks.

I'm female

I'm not tough,
droll or stoical.

I droop
after wine, sex
or intense conversation.

The streets coil around me
when they empty
I'm female
I get scared.

Blue Mountains recluse

I came for the quiet
I don't mind the cold

but thick mists
thick neighbours

and involuntary celibacy

are as inducive to hard drinking
as diesel fumes, high rent
and corrupt cops

I don't like bush walks
or Devonshire Teas

I can't remember what adrenalin
tastes like

I need Sydney
I need a new job.

My car

My place is my car.

Peace. Action.
Business and pleasure.

The glove box
crammed with tapes

Patsy Cline twining round me
like a clove cigarette

my windows my work
I spy with my little eye

the cheating world.

The new job

The phone's made of
foaming soap

I'm washing my hands

the phone's getting
smaller and smaller

but keeps ringing

ringing
it's the phone

christ, what's the time?
I wake up

too fast

the sun sharp
in the crack of the curtains

my feet freeze
as I pad to the phone

a woman's voice
pure North Shore

her phone manners
taking forever

yes, I'm Jill Fitzpatrick
yes, I do Missing Persons

how nice a friend of your husband's
remembers me

from a little internal matter
with his solicitor

cleared up nicely
client got his money back

father of six, Grand Mason Pooh-Bah
didn't go to gaol

yes, I remember
the hush money bonus

for a job discreetly done

and now the whole North Shore
loves me

so, Mrs Norris
you haven't seen your daughter

for how long?

Hungry
Money, I'm thinking money

as Mr Norris
in his blue faintly BO'ed suit
leans on the balcony rail
scaring the lorikeets off their sugar

a moody man
who signs the cheques
and lets his wife do the talking
when it's the kids not business

he hopes, as usual,
there's nothing money can't fix

I'm hopeful too

‘There shouldn't be a problem’
I say to his tense shoulders
‘I'll bring her home.’

Twinings

Insects float
black and frantic

on the smooth surface
of the swimming pool

Mrs Norris makes tea

Twinings
I bet myself

before it arrives
set out on a tray
a plump silver pot

my mother
would be proud of me

I sip Earl Grey
quietly

and let them talk
about Mickey

it's not like her
she doesn't take drugs
she doesn't even smoke

she wants to be a journalist

photos

she's pretty
she's sweet
she's too good to be true

her mother stands
brushes down her flowery frock

I take my cue
make reassuring plans

and glance
as I leave

the sun flattening
the withered rockery.

Someone's daughter
Mickey's father
is a gent

and takes me to my car

‘I'll be in touch soon’
I say
holding out my hand

he takes it
too hard and too quickly

a tremor
in his squeezing fingers

I hold my breath
waiting for him to let go

‘She isn't just pretty’
the words sneaking
through his teeth

‘she's special’
I try to ease out
my hand

he hangs on

‘bloody special’

‘I know, mate’
I say gently

pulling my aching fingers
free.

When the tears have dried

Mickey's bedroom
in her parents' home
smells of floor polish
and absence

'I'll have to tear
this room apart'

I tell her mother
who frowns
at my gorilla hands

'What are you looking for?'
she asks
'Drugs?'

'Anything'
I flip the mattress
'that tells me
where she's gone
and who with.'

She moans faintly
and leaves me to it.

You have to be hard in this game.

I remember old Sid Lloyd's line —

'Never tell them
where their kid is
until ya get paid.

When the tears have dried
no-one wants to part
with money.'

Living in her head

I arrange to meet
Mickey's father
on his own

doting Dads aren't always
fools

'Does she like taking off
on her own?'

he shakes his big sad head

'She's a very quiet girl,
likes books'

he smiles

'she's like me
she likes
living in her head.'

Uni cafeteria

In an aromatic stodge
of hot chips and meat
sizzle

students hold hands
blow smoke in each other's faces
and talk

was this Mickey's life
books, raving, drugs, gorging
and anorexia?

it was never mine
this sitting round with friends
and lighting up

nineteen I was in the force
primary school traffic cop
no danger

twenty-one still in the force
baby-sitting female juveniles
no gun

now thirty-eight
all muscle, street smart
no education

fun fun fun

I'm a mono Beach Boys record
my heart breaks

like surf.

Tianna

I spin the kid some bull
about being an old teacher
of Mickey's

I don't look like a teacher

the kid squints at me
suspiciously

'P.E.,' I say
and flex my muscles
under my shirt

she buys it

lots of fit-looking dykes
teach P.E.

but she's no fool
'Mickey hated sport.'

I laugh
like that's old news
'Couldn't do a forward roll
if her life depended on it!'

the kid
all black clothes
and black make up
what's her name?
— Tianna —

looks like glandular fever
and nicotine poisoning
on legs —

starts to relax
and offers me a cigarette

I hide the addict
in my eyes

'No thanks
put my training back a month.'

my voice hearty
as beef tea
across the smoke and laminex
student cafeteria

Tianna lights up anyway

'I haven't seen Mickey
since the Women's Reading'

I smile
with curiosity

she tells me all about it

she hasn't seen Mickey
for a fortnight

'There's a bug going round
Mickey said she felt a bit off.'

I get Mickey's address

it's the same one
her parents gave me

I try a shot in the dark

'Look'
all charm and *entre nous*
'I haven't seen Mickey
since she was at school
and I'm sure she doesn't tell
her folks everything,
is there a bloke in the picture?
I don't want to barge in
on something.'

the kid checks me out
I just pass

'Yeah, sure is'
she inhales
and takes the smoke
right to the bottom
of her lungs

'some fuckwit poet
Mickey reckons
is a big deal.'

I gasp like a groupie

'Who is he?'

she shrugs
'Mickey won't let on'

and pauses
to let in the Western Suburbs

with the tidbit

‘he’s married but.’

Flat-mates

You could skate on the grease
of the kitchen floor

a black puppy noses
the jammed-full bin

the girl yawns
the boy flicks ash on his crotch

still stoned.

‘Look’ I say
‘I know it’s early

I’m sorry
to get you up

I’m looking for Mickey

her parents are worried
just tell me where she is

and I can wrap this up.’

The girl yawns again
christ, it’s not that early

my watch reads ten-thirty

‘Late night, eh?’
I chuckle

I’m not much good
with the younger generation

she checks out my daggy jeans.

The boy’s lips move under
blonde stubble

‘No-one’s under surveillance
in this house.’

he’s got a student polliwog’s vocabulary
shot with a junkie’s paranoia

I open a fresh packet of Drum

‘Got any papers?’ I ask
stupid question

in a room stinking
of stale dope

I roll three cigarettes

we smoke together
in the gungy air

I dig out two fifties
and smooth them flat

‘One each
but I want some co-operation.’

the boy mutters ‘bitch’
but pockets the money

‘She’s on the phone a lot’
the girl says

watching the boy

‘to this asshole
who makes her cry.’

‘Does he have a name?’

the girl blinks

‘Something common ...’
she shrugs
‘like “Fred”.’

Mickey's room

Mickey's room
the only clean patch in the house

her bed-spread
patterned with blue moons

the floor
recently swept

her books
in alphabetical order

her shoes
lined up in the cupboard

her clothes
on hangers

her mirror
smear free

shows my face
pouch-eyed and wrinkled.

Not a lot of time for poetry

She slept on the floor
on a mattress

it looks comfy

By the pillows
in an upended packing case

an albino teddy bear
and two books

dust free

my knees crack
as I kneel to read them

poetry
Bill McDonald and Tony Knight

I've heard of McDonald

Jesus-Loves-Me shit
with the Snowy Mountains thrown in

the Saturday Herald
runs them sometimes

long fucking things

he must be set
on her Uni course

I flip through
the other book

smart arse stuff

only one poem

I can understand

about a teenage girl's
tits reflected

in a motel swimming pool

I read
thrillers myself.

Open books

Currawongs quarrelling
in the gum out my window

I'm going through a box
of Mickey's books

mainly poetry
mainly boys

McDonald and Knight
six volumes each

her favourites

I light a fag
dropping ash on an open page
of a McDonald masterpiece

flicking it clean
I read
Some girls are open books ...

jesus, Bill, we must hang out
in different bars

*Their breath as fresh on my face
as a brand new page ...*

Diana

The door reads
Dr Diana Maitland

I knock twice

she's thirtysomething
maybe forty

her hair honey-blonde
streaks

falls in her eyes
she pushes it back

with a fidgety
nail-bitten hand

she's got eyes
that flirt or fight

she's gritty
she's bright

oh christ help me
she's a bit of alright!

Tell me about you
'I can't talk here'
she says
'how about lunch?'

my grin's splitting me open

she grins back
like I'm fun not work

down in the lift
we chatter and spar

I'm breathlessly silly
we don't talk about Mickey

over lunch
I get rid of brass tacks quickly

'When did you last see Mickey?'

'Her poetry tutorial
a fortnight ago.'

'Did she mention
going away?'

Diana shakes her head.
'She was just her usual self.'

'What's that?'

'Intense and shy.
Like most poetry maniacs.'

Diana's finger dips

in the froth of my cappuccino

she licks her finger slowly

‘Tell me about you’
she says.

Taste of a job

I like to taste
a new job

I like to follow
its flavour.

And this one?

Alcohol. A smooth red.

A taste
I'm not used to

a taste
going straight to my head.

Freak show

Am I Diana's freak show?

She wants to know all about it.
The bars. The scene.
All my old lovers.

‘How many women have you slept with?’

I counted them up
and told her.

Her clever eyes smirk
and prise me apart.

We keep meeting for coffee
we don't talk about Mickey

could it be
she fancies me?

Spring

The spring trees
like Cracker Night sparklers

all over Sydney

every garden
every dead street
littered

under this flower fire

am I in love again?

my hands and heart
aching

for blossom
for wild wild risk.

The Happy Hour
It's House Riesling

and my third
in half an hour.

Christ, what's the time?

The Happy Hour
it says on the wall.

I'm happy all right
fucking hysterical.

Where is she?

One woman arrives
with her good legs

she could be her
but isn't.

Some other woman
has her pale freckled hand
curved around a glass

she could be her too
but isn't isn't.

Diana.

Her name climbs
from my toe-nails
to the bite of my teeth

and blooms
in my mouth

like a black-red rose

is it someone
wearing her perfume?

is it heart-burn?

is it the grog?

Little Aussie battler

'How can you stand
living so far
from the city?'
Diana asks
looking lovingly out
at Glebe Point Road

'My work isn't trendy'
I say
'it's mostly
in the Western Suburbs

I live in the Mountains
because Blacktown
or Penrith
would kill me.'

'My little Aussie battler'
Diana smiles
'my little Aussie snob.'

Mr Diana

'You're a pint-sized Cliff Hardy,'
Nick says
pouring me a beer

'Us real ones
come in all
shapes and sizes.'

Nick smiles.

He's pretty. pretty.
with his blonde pony tail
his soft blue jeans.

I can feel
Diana stroking him.

'Most of the PIs I get to meet
are big ugly pricks,

ex-cops
too bent
even for the force.'

'I'm an ex-cop.'
I tell
this young, leftie lawyer.

'Weren't you too short?'
Diana winks
and sips her gin and tonic

she's showing me up

her boy joins in

'How's your nose
for tracking down
North Shore brats?'

he picks his nose
as he talks
too gorgeous to care

'Bit of a waste
of a smart woman's time.'

'This smart woman
needs the money.'

my voice gruff
like a boy
trying to hold his own
with a man

Diana holds her glass up

'I knew you two
would hit it off.'

Style
In love I've got no style

my heart is decked out
in bright pink tracksuit pants

it weaves its huge bummed way
through the tables to Diana

she's reading something
with very fine print

she doesn't need her glasses
to see me.

Driving to her place
blue dusk

my car glides
like a hovercraft

the wheel plays
sweet
in my hands

this time

will we just talk?

First move
I reach past my glass
take her hand

I didn't plan this

my fingers freeze
on her warm veins

I can't read her eyes

silence

will she?
will she?

touch me

I'm
right out in the open

I'm a fucking fool

oh Jesus Diana

she's turning her hand
moist palm
into mine

her skin

you could hear my heart
in Perth

she picks up my hand
I swallow my tongue

she brings my hand
to her mouth

and sucks my ring
finger

'you're trembling'
she says

my other hand
floats to her

touches her throat

her perfume
her eyes

the hot tip
of her tongue.

Wet
Here
I feel it here

flutter
groan
grind in the belly

what jellies my legs?
what flash-floods my cunt?

First time
we're laughing on her bed

my fingers struggle
with her bra catch

'Didn't they teach you
this in Brownies?'

she lets her breasts free

they fall in my hands

her nipples grow
between my lips

she strokes my hair
'Jill'

my name in her mouth

my eyes close
in the musk and silk
of her belly

her thighs
under my nose

the sweetness of her

as she shudders
on my mouth

'So that's what
they taught you in Brownies'

she laughs in my arms.

The ex
'Why did you and Chris split up?'
Diana asks.

'Listen, sweetheart,
I'll tell you
a dyke cautionary tale

about my one and only
marriage
my three-legged race

Chris and me
were as snuggly
as guinea pigs

our house our hutch
where it rained
carrots and lettuce

snuggly buggly
in our cuddly secret
we had a lovely life

until hand feeding
and bed-time stories
made us fat and dozy

and a big bad fox got in.'

'Oh dear'
Diana says
nuzzling my breast
'I promise
it won't be Beatrix Potter
with me.'

'Good'
I sigh.

Legless
You forget

you get old and blunt

you forget what it's like

her taste on my mouth
her smell on my hands

the cops should pick me up
I can't walk a straight line.

Hanging around
I'm mooching around the phone

she said
she'd ring in a week

a week ago

is the fucking thing
out of order?

its dial tone drones
healthily in my ear

I'm giving myself the runs
from too much coffee

I'm smoking myself
sick

I've lost a kilo

I do aerobics
I practise karate

has the bitch
lost my number?

does Nick listen in
on all her calls?

the phone rings

I let it sing
for a delicious second

it's not her

Mickey's mother

she'll tie up the phone
for hours

the voice crumbles

'They've found her.'

Fuck all

I bet the little bugger
was up north
with her poet boyfriend
smoking dope
writing each other
sonnets

now she's back
for her pocket money

where does that
leave me?

with the retainer
and a few expenses

I did fuck all
apart from
fuck her teacher

the voice is whispering
the voice fades

'I can't believe she's dead.'

Bump

The wheel bumps
over something soft.

A small tabby

with a collar.

It twists
in a broken somersault
away from me

it's frothing blood.

Mickey's mother
I can't make her wait

a car stops behind me

please,
I say,
I'm in a terrible hurry

please,
ring a vet.

A man
with a furrowed burnt face
and slow eyes

uh huh,
he says
looking down
at the squirming cat

and I go.

Brandy

It's a beautiful night

a koel starts up
its one weird note

this time
we're drinking brandy
not tea

their faces slack
and grey

I talk to them
soothingly
they keep pouring brandy

I know the morgue
its stainless steel
its room freshener

and antiseptic smell

Mickey's father
cries first

her mother says

'We recognised her
by her clothes.'

In police hands

'It's now in the hands of the police'
Mickey's Mum's parting words
as I head for the door

hands of the police
hands of the police

it'd make you puke
to see anything
a can of coke, a smoke,
a Smith and Wesson
or a dead girl's skull
in Detective Sergeant Wesley's
thick fingers

I know his hands well

my last case
he took me in
showed me a cell
showed me the flat
of his hand

'No witnesses'
he said
wiping his palm
on the shine of his pants
'Whaddya call it, love?
Stop police attacks on women,
gays and blacks!
Let ya lezzo mates shout you a demo
for Christmas.'

two weeks later
he got decorated
for bravery

in police hands
Mickey in police hands

the night air sneaks
in my car window
yowling like an unfed cat.

Moonlight

The full moon
plops on a phone booth

in this freaky light
I could be standing

in a puddle of piss
I ring Diana anyway

‘Mickey was murdered’

the words sound
stuttered and stupid

a shallow grave
in the National Park

I go on about dogs
digging her up

my hand shines white

‘Doesn't this happen in your job
all the time?’

Diana's voice slaps me sober.

Then she makes
right noises

poor kid
how are her parents coping?

till she blurts
her news

‘It's all happening!’

research grant come through
big offer from UCLA

I'm full of tired bullshit
I say

congratulations.

Brutal end for Mickey, petite, pretty and only nineteen

Mickey's murder on Page Three

under the big black headlines
the photo taken by her dad
at her eighteenth birthday party

‘petite, pretty and only nineteen’
like a line from a sixties song

‘sexually assaulted, strangled and dumped

Mickey in a police lens
chunks out of her arms and legs
from the pack of dogs that found her

barefoot,
her shirt round her neck
no pants,
her face swollen with rot

laid out by her killer
in the foetal position.

Dead kids

Dead kids upset me.

There's no drink
to take away the taste
of a fresh face rotting.

Useless
to tremble and vomit
and howl it's not fair.

You look at the spots
on the back of your hand
you look at the lines
fraying your face.

But you're still glad
it's the kid
not you.

Mediterranean back

Three weeks of insurance work

binoculars, note-book, camera
and the car whiffy with chips

under observation

a squat Greek

top floor flat

he waddles out
into the street
with a brindled mongrel
that pisses on my wheel

is the Greek's wander
to the corner shop
a bit brisk
for a buggered back?

'Mediterranean back'
the boys at Mutual HQ
would say

did he hang that plant?

did he hit his mutt?

all very sus.

Oh christ.
Just write it up.

I'll ring you
And Diana.

Always this
I'll ring you crap.

Sure, I say.

Sure
because I don't want to hassle

sure
because she's married

sure
because something's better than nothing

because her voice

her breasts her mouth her smell

make me stupid.

Family barbecues

Family barbecues
hit the nerve
like a drunk dentist

why didn't they reject me
when I came out?

I should be so lucky
to sit stiff-spined
and harmless
sipping warm beer
in the bedlam
of in-laws and kids

avoiding my mother's
tolerant, anxious eye.

My mother

Why am I thinking
about my mother?

my bum itchy
on the hot seat

the dead quiet
boring street

why am I thinking
about my mother?

no music
just minding my own business

waiting for my crook-back Greek
to do aerobics
on his front balcony

I can't be conspicuous

can't be conspicuous

Mum sniffs
'Jill, you can look really nice
when you want to

it won't kill you
to wear a dress
now and then.'

Mum touches my hair
'It used to be so pretty.'

and after three gin and tonics

'You don't have to be
so conspicuous
we all know what you are.'

do you, Mum?
I'm curious. Fill me in.

What am I?

Shining footprints

My wet footprints
shine
on the floor

two phone calls in a row
yank me
out of the shower

my legs running water

second call
Diana
and my breast perks
out of the towel

'I don't care
if every factory in Parramatta
is torched tonight'

I don't pause for breath
or pride

'Insurance Mutual can get fucked.
Mickey's mother has just rung
she's jack of the cops
I'm back on the job.

oh, darlin', where ya been?'

Work

Today
I should be working

I should be going through
the coroner's report

asking questions

was Mickey killed
where her body was found?

what do the bruises
on her buttocks mean?

Today
I'm not working

I'm seeing Diana.

She buys me French champagne
'Veuve Clicquot'

I read the label silently
no French classes at my old school

my thumb strokes
the cold green swelling
of the bottle

'Don't swill it, sweetheart'
she bubbles down my throat
'it's not Great Western.'

'I can read.'
I watch her eyes
'What's the occasion?'

she takes a breath

I watch her hand
in mid-air
before she pushes it
through her hair

'I've missed you, Jillie.'

The best fuck
'Am I the best fuck you've ever had?'

Diana's chin on my thigh
her eyes smoking up at me

I'm water turned to steam
my skin scalded pink

I sigh
wanting to gush
endearments, aching words, all my heart's
stormwater banked up for weeks

Diana's cocky voice
makes me bite my tongue

I hold out my arms

'No,' she says, 'I like to watch'

I give in
and feel her eyes touching me
from throat to cunt.

Her clever hand

My car cassettes clatter
at Diana's feet

'Don't you listen to boys?'

'I've spent my whole life
listening to boys.'

I answer on feminist autopilot

she crosses her legs
she's wearing a dress

I drive and perve

her calves do a silky stretch
her hand taut with blue veins

as she slots in k.d.lang

'Butch country 'n' western'
she murmurs in the raunchy riffs

'Don't you ever forget I'm a dyke?'

she slips her clever hand
between my thighs

to make me quiet.

Her breasts

Her breasts are not my breasts.

Under her dress
they push
towards my hands

Under my hands

they push
towards my breasts

they stop my heart.
they close my eyes.

she's not my mother
she's not my friend

Diana. Dracula.

Her breasts suck me.

No thrillers

While she's in the toilet
I check out her books.

On the shelf
thick books
fresh-smelling paper
academic stuff.

A muddle of novels
by the bed
French and South American

no thrillers, no crap.

Does she bring her work home?

Or is this Diana?

Incessantly intellectual.

Street café

I hate street cafés

you're either
shivering in a gritty wind
or squinting
in the grimy sun

I fidget
Diana watches the traffic

'Here's Nick!'
she sits up

the coffee lumps in my gut

Nick swims over

nibbles her nose
and plops in a chair

'G'day' he says
'you're not too busy
dobbing in migrant Workers' Comp. cheats
to join two lefties for lunch?'

'Mate' I reply
'when I heard you were coming

it was a simple case
of pleasure before business.'

he laughs
'You're a brazen little tart.

What are ya having?
It's on me.'

Dyke Othello

'You know' Diana says
her mouth moving on my
collar bone
'I only love you for your stories.
You're my dyke Othello.'

I don't know
what she's on about

but it sounds like
a compliment

I chew on her ear
'Have I told you about the time
I worked for Jacquie Biquette?'

'No!'

Jacquie's such a big deal
in the jazz and short black set

'Well, she's a dyke'

'Christ, is she?
Doesn't look like one.'

I let that pass.

'She hired me in the strictest
confidence'

I'm blabbing

'to check up on her girlfriend
a baby dyke
into older women and expensive leathers

when she's not bludging off
some poor besotted bitch

she's making home grown videos
for Canberra's mail order
porn market.

Jacquie was just plain old-fashioned
jealous

she thought she was seeing
another woman

I had to trail that little slag
through every girl bar

from here to Melbourne.'

Diana pinches one of my smokes

'And was she?'

'Not another woman.
Just women.
All shapes and sizes.
From ex-Mulawa koories
to Toorak lipstick dykes.'

Diana grins
'That's a good story.'

she'll tell Nick

why can't I keep my mouth shut?

The old bag
Her cheek soft and sticky
on my breast

I stroke out the knots
in her hair

'You're going grey
over your ears'

my voice
soft and sticky

‘I’m just an old bag’

her breath making
my nipple hard

‘Is that what Nick calls you?’

have I gone mad?

she doesn't move
nothing but her breath
and the ache in my tit

I close my eyes
and wait for her
to leave

‘Nick doesn't notice
the grey over my ears’

she kisses my breast

‘Nick doesn't notice
anything.’

My sweetheart
‘My shout’

in my hurry
my wallet spills its guts
all over the floor

Diana picks up my plastic
fastidiously

then pounces
on a photo

‘I thought I was
your sweetheart’
she says

tracing the line
of Mickey's jaw
and neck

with a chewed nail.

Discretion

‘Does Nick know about us?’

I'm not tasting
my croissant

she helps herself
to my rollies

and keeps me waiting

‘Why would you mind
if he did?’

‘Because’
my voice
tight as asthma
‘he's a perve
because
it's our business’

Diana smiles

‘He likes you
he likes
talking about you
almost as much

as I do.’

Louie

Louie's a New Ageing
lesbian poet
an old mate

and my guide to the poetry scene

over a rabbit food lunch
I talk about nothing
but Diana

Louie crunches her carrot

‘What's her star sign?’

‘I don't know
next time I see her
I'll ask for you.’

‘She must be a Cancer’

Louie picks the walnuts
out of her salad
with nicotine-stained
fingers

'Diana is a Moon name
a witch name'

Lou's eyes
half glitter at me
and half perve
at the young blonde butch

sniggering
with her girlfriend
at the next table

'all Moon women are Cancers.'

'Well,' I confess
'my Diana sure waxes
and wanes.'

Louie frowns

'Tell me more
about the murdered girl

tell me
what you're doing.'

Good legs
I'd kill for good legs.

Mickey had legs
that would have stopped
traffic —

traffic. traffic.

my mind's jammed.

Is it easier
lusting after Mickey's legs
than looking at her face?

Through the static
My mobile phone pings
it's Mickey's father

I drive with one hand

as he stammers through the static

‘When you know
who killed her

don't tell the police
tell me

I'm not going to wait
for his light sentence

I'm not going to wait
for his parole

let the social workers wail
about his terrible childhood

after I've finished with him.'

I try to reassure him
until I hear a noise

it's not crying

it's worse.

No chips

At this book launch
you pay for your drinks
at the bar

and listen to the writer
and her best friend
and her editor

make long speeches

my stomach growls

‘Lou, where's the chips?’

Illiterate and stupid

Is it me?

Is it because I left school
at sixteen?

I don't understand
this crowd.

I've lost Lou

she's busy
working the room

'schmoozing'
she calls it
giving me a wet kiss
ordering me
to have another drink
and hang in there

she's found him
Mr Poetry Business
a wanker with a pubic bush
red beard
and a big voice
that spits

I've-got-a-big-dick
epics
all over the front row

Lou says
he could help us

what about
the academic feminist

with her long poem
about a Greek goddess
doing the dishes

can she help us too?

Or is it just me?

Illiterate and stupid.

Just like the brain-dead cops
Nick loves
demolishing in the witness box.

Barbara

Louie's nose ring
distracts me

as she jerks her face
into my cheek
whispering
'That's Barbara!
Tony Knight's wife.'

Tony Knight!
'I found his books
all autographed affectionately
in Mickey's room ...'

'They had the whole scene
sewn up'
Lou goes on
'before Tony pissed off
to Brisbane.'

her lips moving on my cheek,
bloody incorrigible.

'You couldn't fart
in the poetry scene
without Barbara's permission,
Tony's two cents worth
in the *Herald*

could mean a grant
or a publisher.'

I nod
watching Barbara light
a cigarette
with tiny pretty paws

Louie's breath tickling
moist

'You know why Tony's in Brisbane?
Barbie's after his balls'

Barbara's eyes
even across a smoke-filled room
are beautiful
and beautifully made up

'Tony runs a casting couch
for young female poets,
Barbie caught him
giving some sweet hopeful ...'

I straighten my shoulders
forcing Lou back

and see Mickey's nervous fingers
spreading out in Tony's lap
pages and pages of poems.

Kicking corns

At another launch
generously catered
I jump
in front of Barbara Knight

‘Yes?’
her voice tense and pleasant
with all those private school vowels

where do I know you from?
her eyes click over me
like computer keys

I put her out of her misery.

‘I’m a private investigator’

and tell her my name

‘Wondered where you fitted in’
she murmurs
with her party smile

‘I’m on the Mickey Norris case’
I test the water

she lifts a drink
from a passing tray
without spilling a drop

‘That’s a trick
you must teach me’
I’m twinkling

Barbara takes in
my finger-combed butch hair
and stops herself flirting
cold

‘Mickey who?’

‘Norris.
A young fan of your husband’s.’

‘Well?’

Doesn’t Barbara read the paper?

‘She went missing ...’

‘Missing what?’

‘Taste?’
I suggest

she turns on her neat heel

leaving me
holding my end of the repartee
like an empty glass.

Poetry Reading

Gut rot grog

Diana warned me
about poetry readings

‘They’re only supposed to read
for fifteen minutes,
you’ll learn
Einstein’s Theory of Relativity
first hand, my dear,
fifteen minutes can stretch
like an old rubber band.’

Can Bill McDonald read a watch?

He’s been up there
for at least an hour
no. only ten minutes.

Jesus.

I’m starting to hallucinate.

No wonder
Diana wouldn’t come.

I’ve tried listening.

Bill calls light ‘dusky’
in every bloody poem

and he’s got a thing
about his grandfather’s hat

the lucky old bastard
must be dead.

Come on, Bill,

that's it, mate,
last fucking poem

I'll be dead and burnt to ashes
before Bill's dusky light
sets
on his Grandad's hat.

Hippy poets
After the break
it's a hippy circus

three pretty boys, one mug girl,
tossing their curls

shouting their poems
between costume changes

whales and rainforests
line after blubbering line

get me a harpoon
get me a bulldozer

better still
fetch my wicked woman

darling, don't make me sit
through this shit

on my own.

How do you talk to poets?
We shake hands
and I'm stuck

how do you talk to poets?

I'm not known for my love
of fluffy clouds
fields of daffodils
or brumbies on a moonlit night

give me a good bottle of wine
a woman with spit and spark
and the Trifecta at Randwick

'You're a sensitive man,
Mr McDonald, and I'd like to discuss
a sensitive matter.'

He smiles.

He's tall, pale and limp
like the kind of pasta
that dribbles on your shirt
on a first date

his mouth is arrogant
and nervous

he licks his thin lips
with a whitish tongue

‘How can I help you?’

the sort of voice that wows
the First Year Arts girlies
all ears in the front row

‘I'm investigating the murder
of Mickey Norris.’

‘Are you a police officer?’

His eyes patronise
the girl constable.

‘No. I'm working for Mickey's parents.’

‘That poor girl.
A shocking thing.’

‘Did you know her?’

‘She wrote to me
and sent her poems,
an occupational hazard
for a poet on the H.S.C.’

‘The price of fame, mate’
I say without thinking

he snags on my gag

‘I don't suppose you get much fan mail
in your line of work.’

he plays with the cross
around his neck
oh christ, a Christian

‘Did you ever meet Mickey?’

‘No. Just a correspondence.’
clutching his cross

‘What did she write about?’

‘Nothing much.
I told her I was busy.’

‘She was the keen one
in this correspondence?’

‘She wanted me
to look at her poems.’

‘And did you?’

‘Yes.
One or two.’

He looks over my shoulder
and wiggles his eyebrows
at a pal

‘Look, this is a terrible business
but that's all the help
I can give.’

‘Can I see the poems
she sent you?’

‘I'm sorry.
I tore them up.’

he tucks away his cross
and shuffles his feet

‘Why?’

He frowns.
‘They were obscene.’

he smiles as thinly
as packet soup
and slips away.

Poem on the answering machine

I hit my front door

a clammy mist

coiling around my feet

like a Transylvanian
welcome mat

my house smells
of an empty long day

as I turn on
the answering machine

a precise male voice fills the room

'Fitzpatrick, you stupid cunt
you're playing with your life
so don't take a punt

I know where to find you
I'm just taking my time
before I do what I do

you don't know me
but, slut, I know you
just wait and fucking see

so now I'll end my pretty poem
I hope you've got the message —
expect a visit when you're home.'

I light a fag

and play my telephone poem
over and over.

Sex and poetry

I never knew poetry
was about
opening your legs
one minute

opening your grave
the next

I never knew poetry
could be
as sticky as sex.

How poems start

Is this how poems start?

when every riff on the radio

hooks in your throat

is this how poems start?

when the vein under her skin
hooks in your throat

is this how poems start?

when insomnia pounds
like spooked black horses

when the day breaks
like car crash glass

tell me, Mickey,
you knew

tell me

does a poem start
with a hook in the throat?

Bluff

I watch her peel
a mango

I watch her play
with the buttons on her shirt

I watch her fiddle
with her wine glass

we aren't talking much

until I say
'I know about Mickey's diary.'

'I hope' Diana says
'it makes better reading than her poetry.'

I raise her
'It wasn't bad enough to burn.'

she won't blink

'I imagine most of it
was wishful thinking

like her poetry.'

I drink my coffee too fast
it isn't brandy

and burn my tongue

'Did she meet Nick
through you?'

Diana concentrates
on the sugar bowl

'You and Barbara Knight
make very strange bedfellows

she tells her shrink
fairy stories too

she'll leave you
with egg on your face.'

Christ, is Diana spilling!
I'll get back to Barbara.

Now for lay-down misère.

'The diary had a lot
of wishful thinking

a lot of fairy stories too
about Nick.'

Diana's eyes glitter

'Did dear little Barbara
tell you
I'm fucking Tony?'

I nod
and wink across the table
'All the way from Brisbane?

Wow.
He must have the longest dick
in Australia.'

What Diana taught me
She never taught me
to like real coffee

french novels
obscure boy poets

her terrace renovations

or lies.

She taught me
to drop my guard

close my eyes
and fall over.

She taught me
pleasure.

What girls know
what girls can do.

I owe her.

Steam

Nowhere to park

I chance my luck
and park
down the side of the Gardens

there's a storm
boiling
in the muddy air

my feet
my armpits
steam

I sprint to the Gallery

and get a stitch

gasping
like a teenage boy
after a climax
in the cool polished portals

towards the glass
upstairs
I can see Diana

she's not reading
she's chewing her lip

good

I hit the Ladies
have a wee
splash my face
do my hair

it's still Diana

give me six months
I'll laugh at myself.

Last throw

She orders me a cappuccino
and smiles
running her tongue
that quick pink tip
over her lip

nerves
not a flirt

I still watch her
with a jangled gut

'What are you going to do?'
she says
not wasting time

'What are you going to do?'
I volley.

'Protect my interests.'

no cringing, no crawling

'Don't protect Nick.'
I wipe off
my froth moustache

questions clag in my throat

is it the bastard's money?
what do you owe him?

'You can't make
the mud stick, Jill,
you open your mouth
we'll sue.'

she's smiling
her eyes
show the black pit

of the old woman
she'll become

you can't save her
I slap down my Galahad fool

'Is it his money, sweetheart?
You've sold yourself fucking cheap!'

she's on her feet

my last throw
of lovers' talk

'Mickey's parents'
I say quietly
as she rips through
her bag for her purse

'are mind-bogglingly boring people'

she's still
she's listening

'Nick's really jazzed up their lives —

without Nick
they might never have known
the smell of the morgue

without Nick
they might never have known
the smell
of their daughter's decomposing face.'

oh, Diana, Diana,
my heart palpitates
like a pop song

'Jealousy's making you hallucinate'
she hisses

and she's gone.

The monkey's mask
I walk back to the car
in wild hot rain

rain, rain,
forty days, forty nights

and the inner city drowns

and Diana's terrace floats
out to sea

Forget the bitch.
Case solved.

My hair draggles
in drenched coils
I could be Medusa
out for a stroll

okay, Medusa,
turn all these fuckers
to stone

turn those fraud poets
to marble
a staircase leading nowhere
in a Stalinist museum

turn Nick
to sandstone
and let him crumble

turn Diana ...
loose.

Mickey's ghost walks
in this tropical rain

she swings in the fig trees

her voice
glistens green and wet

she's growing dark

she's wearing a monkey's mask.

Wild Surmise

For Andy

*Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER
John Keats*

*Behold now, standing before you, the man who
has pierced the air and penetrated the sky,
wended his way amongst the stars and
overpassed the margins of the world
LA CENA DE LE CENERI
Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)*

Europa

Let us travel
the three hundred and ninety million miles
to Jupiter's smoothest moon,
Europa.

You can't miss Jupiter,
hanging over its moon
in a whirling rainbow mass
of push, pull and poison.

Feel Europa's freezing
toxic silence.

You're standing on a raft
of thick alien ice,
but you're moving—
floating like a berg
on the deepest ocean
in the unknown world.

This is the roof, the shield
of a black liquid world,
where you may one day
drop like a warm stone.

A new world
where you might learn
colder lessons
than nothing.

As she knows it

The hooks and dreams and siren's songs
from the Galileo and Cassini probes
swarm luminescent
like deep water squid
on Alex Leefson's computer screen.

Life

as she doesn't know it
calls and calls
like a parching hunt.

Life

as she does know it
is the chat-show circuit
where Alex flamboyantly plays
astronomy's glamour girl
talking up
the Solar System's alien life
hidey holes
with a rapturous intimacy.

Astrobiology

Was this a kamikaze career move?

Taking up astrobiology's
butterfly net
and swatting at teases, guesses
and fairy dust?

In planetary science
I made exciting
but solid ground.

No one knew
no one talked
about celestial volcanoes
with more power
more public panache
than me.

I drew down
for packed halls
the slumbering gigantic cones
on pink Mars.

I conjured the Goddess of Love
stalking
with ancient pancake lava
footprints

across the lead-boiling lethal
surface of Venus.

I played sexy movies
of Io, Jupiter's live-wire moon,
erupting
with jagged spurts
of fiery green sulfur.

So when
did this latest infatuation
get a grip?

Why am I,
a happily childless woman,
now waiting
for Life
like a junkie waits
for a fix?

Perhaps I'm craving
that almighty hit
when I know
when I prove
Life.
Gloriously elsewhere.
Life.
Brazenly everywhere.

Bombs away
Alex was hopeless
at sitting by the phone.

When would Europa ring?

She would be perfectly happy
with a terse e-mail

I'm alive

She remembers being cornered
by an aggressively acned Yankee
boy wonder engineer
at an exobiology conference
under a glacial air-conditioning vent
in the Houston Hilton,
his hands trembling
as he cradled an imaginary bomb

‘What are we waiting for?
Just drop this little mother

on the ice
boom!
and watch my Ice Clipper
sail through the splash
and snatch those bugs
like flypaper.'

There were days when Alex
would have bombed Europa
to slush and stinking fish

just so she too
would know.

Always Mars

Where there's water
there's a chance,
a sniff,
a hope of life.

Was there still
somewhere,
lurking and seeping,
water on Mars?

Alex couldn't care.

It was always Mars.
Like a pink-skinned first son,
who got all the feverish
breath-holding celebratory
attention.

Always Mars.
As if Europa were a remote
and selfish daughter
who lived too far away
to be useful.

But perhaps Europa
was lucky,
like many an overlooked woman
she could settle intimately
and unmolested
into her secrets.

Water

My garden is no alien.

Greeting me
when it rains

with a goose-pimpling eucalyptus
embrace.

Our lemon tree glows
like a quenched prayer.

May it listen to mine.

Oh, Europa, please trust
and take me in.

Let me be the divining rod
quivering
over your deep treasure
of water.

Clear delirium

Bruno, forgive me,
for thinking about you
at a barbecue.

I've always loved you
just as much,
for having the icy guts
to knock back a crucifix
shoved at your hands
through the holy flames,
as for your clear delirium
of other worlds—

blasphemously countless
planets. moons. stars.
all brazen with life,
a celestial standing ovation
to your reckless gall.

In your time
they would have burnt me too,
for a venomous assortment
of mainly misogynist reasons.

But let me send you greetings,
and a waft of burnt sausage,
from these early years
of the twenty-first century.

Bruno, your bright cinders
are still blowing cruelly
into the dank eyes
of the orthodox.

Bless me
as your bold new breeze.

Help me make them
blink.

Europa's shadow
Jupiter shimmers
from Alex's computer screen.

Alex's ageing, bright eyes
lap over
her giant planet
aglow
with the whirling glitter
of ammonia clouds.

But Alex's loving
and probing gaze
snags
on the melanoma spot
of Europa.

Just its tiny shadow,
the moon itself
a little white pill
on the right of the screen.

An hallucinogen,
if recklessly swallowed,
lodging itself
like a stalking octopus
under the rocks
of the swallower's dreams.

Suddenly Alex calls out
to her husband, Daniel,
morosely muttering
over his marking.

She is his Europa,
and he shoves his students'
stilted stories
and pretentious poems
onto the floor.

What is it this time?

What dazzling snatch
of incomprehensible wonder
will she deign, briefly,

to share with him?

Daniel's epigram

My wife is no one's moon.
I am no one's sun.

Blue light

The morning begins bluey
for Daniel Morgan
with the light struggling
but glimmering
behind the winter drama
of stark bare trees

he's reading Ovid
in translation
but stops now and then
to watch the light
changing,
from a thick grey pink
to an airy thin blue
that he can feel expanding
in his lungs
like a gust of imagery.

He puts Ovid to one side,
praying to Ovid's gods, his gods,
to keep him this alert
this happily ravished by poetry
forever.

Melbourne coffee shops

Alex is a Sydney girl.
That shallow restlessness
always whingeing for water.

While I have measured out my life
in the morning newspaper
and espresso pleasure
of coffee shops.

Let Alex hunger for her Harbour.
Give me Brunswick Street,
and the warm view from Mario's
on a wild winter's day
when the street is flooding
with feral human traffic
elated with wind and walking
against the cold driving wet.

Coffee Dante

There's nothing like
a perfect coffee.

There's nothing like
that first sip
of a new Dante translation.

Does it have the right terza rima
aroma?

O, yes.
And once again
I'm swaying on the deck
of the best poetry
in the world.

Coffee Dante,
get me through this day.
Slip me
your steam, your sweet froth.

Different ponds

Daniel smirks
as he puts down
a steaming pot of tea
for his wife

'How much is that doggy
in the window?'
he points at her bizarre
screen saver
blowing bubbles across the screen

'Priceless.'
Alex yawns
splaying her fingers in the air
like starfish
'It's my ichthyosaur.
He's extinct,
but watch for his pal.'

and a dolphin
almost boring
in its New Age cuteness
waggles into view
'Cousins?'
Daniel asks

Alex picks up
her fossil fish,
etched like an X Ray

on a jagged piece of clayey
slate,
and weighs it lovingly
in her hand

‘Convergent evolution, darling,
where flippers
in one animal
are still flippers
in another completely different animal.’

she squeezes the fossil
and holds it to her ear
like a seashell

‘If there is life
in the European sea,
if there is just enough

for them to fucking eat,
convergent evolution says
the critters of Europa
could look something
like our fish, our squid
our whales, our jellyfish.’

Daniel thinks suddenly
of Ovid's surreal
bestiality

‘I can't see even randy old Jupiter’
he says pointing
at the ichthyosaur
‘jumping that bugger.’

Alex nods blankly
and returns to the screen

and once again
they're paddling
in different ponds.

Teaching

Daniel used to enjoy teaching.
Three thousand years ago.

The usual whinge
about corporate dickheads
destroying Higher Education
was even tireder
than he was.

Some of his fellow lecturers
murmured amongst themselves
that all their Asian students
looked the same.

Daniel didn't discriminate.
All his students looked
and sounded
the same.
Fucking dull.

While Alex's ravenous brain
was launching itself
in a shower of psychic sparks
at Europa,
towards what reeking
stale-cabbage-soup
nursing home
was his cantankerous mind
shuffling?

The fertile egg

Alex sips on her Diet Coke,
feeling it burn down her throat
like an acidic amphetamine,
burping over the latest Europa
pics
she absent-mindedly wipes
her mouth
while her brain revs
and begins its white-hot
focus.

On some mornings
her mind
could ignite paper

what if what if
her imagination stammers
staring at Europa's
cracked-eggshell surface

what if
the ice is protecting

the ocean
like a shell protects
the gummed-eyed chick?

What if

the ice were shielding
a marine sanctuary?
Not just a sprinkle
of struggling microbes?

It was always easier
to grow and live
big
in water.

What if
the ice were nurturing
a weightless world
of gliding blind giants?

Shocking

And when I first stick my hand
in Europa's water
will a shock pass
straight through me?

Like Michelangelo's Adam stretching
his finger to God's
will a shock pass
straight through me?

What will gush forth
when my rib is struck?

What unfortold creature will swim
through the umbilical cord
of this Eve's brain?

Anomalocaris

I'm drifting away
from the restaurant noise
and Daniel's amusing whingeing
about his boss—

the grilled prawn's head
leaks warm juice
through my fingers—

and my head floods
with Cambrian shallow water,
when the land was verboten
and Earth's warm sea teemed—

swimming a rippling swathe
through the sponges
is *anomalocaris*—

a robotic predator
with a struggling trilobite
in its shrimpish claws—

anomalocaris's digestive juices
go crazy
while I'm tasting
the salty wet light.

No briny nursery like this
likely
in the European ice black sea.

What abyss-flavoured thing
with starving electro-sensors
will home in
on my blind thrashings
and bite off
my calcium-rich head?

Niches

Alex lies dreamily
in the warm niche
of Daniel's arms

and thinks,
with a guilty smirk,
that it's easier to doze
in a warm niche
without the bombardment
of lust's charged particles

but
and Alex shifts position
as Europa seeps in
maybe niches would be
nothing
but sterile puddles of warm slush
without the energy-driving
smack
of radiation

the crackling hiss
of hit and miss

passion and poison

is Life's Law
the same for organic particles
as for human hearts?

accelerate me hard

and suddenly all the bacteria
in all Europa's, all Alex's,
warm niches
wave their flagella
in one wild accord.

The Venusian Sea

Water

I prickle awake at four a.m.
in the desert dark
dreaming of water

O for a solo passage
across the impossible
Venusian Sea!

Water
a wet green whiff—
the rusty Martian flood plains
squawking into life

Water
my own bloodstream
trilling with minerals
whelped in the stars.

O for the El Dorado gold
at the glimmering bottom
of the taken-off-course
white rapids spin!

Water, deep water,
the dream in my side
through which I'm dribbling.

Colour

This morning,
in Sydney
for the Extrasolar Planets Conference,
Alex's optic nerve pumps
a gush of colour
straight to her heart

there is a flash green lorikeet
hanging upside down
trembling an orange-red flower
on the thorny-barked coral tree

she can't hear or smell
a thing

it's all colour!
the light
surging into her eyes
while her heart trips
and blinks.

Could any other world
bring her eye's pulse
to this sublime boil?

Could her passion for colour
keep her earthed, keep her wilfully
in the dark?

Her photo

It's Phoebe.
Headlining the programme.
The celebrity Nay-Sayer.

It's Phoebe.
Nine years older.
Full colour spread
of the Universe whirling about her
like huge sparkling skirts.

Phoebe.
With a shorn pretty head
like an Emperor's clever
bemused catamite.

Phoebe staring down infinity
with her light green eyes
like a whiphand flicker
of chlorophyll.

Phoebe's cool hard proofs
of the accelerating universe
are making her famous
trust Phoebe to discover
the Universe is running away from us

who else would so revel
in a cosmic future of freezing
nothingness?

But that full know-it-all mouth
the battle tilt of her chin
those steady-state lovely cold eyes.

It's Phoebe.
Her image thriving and multiplying
in Alex's capitulating cells.

Even though it's light years
too late,
Alex tears out the page
rips the Universe in half
and scrunches Phoebe's photo
into a tight hot accelerating ball.

At nine thousand feet

Alex first met Phoebe
at nine thousand feet

it was 1994

Alex had been married
to Daniel
for two quick hectic
happy years

later
Alex would say
at nine thousand feet
no one has any judgment

but deep in her own sea-level
heart
she would never let it go

some insistent part of her
would guzzle the dizzying oxygen
at nine thousand feet
with a phantom Phoebe forever

she accepted
between avid kisses
Phoebe's rules

this was a typical
Mauna Kea romance
'the real altitude sickness'
Phoebe had said
her arms wrapped around Alex
like a space blanket,
while blazing galaxies smoked
outside their window

'but'

and Alex would never forget
the dark turn in Phoebe's close
breathing
'I've got a life, a life
I never dreamed I'd have,
a life
of such mental freedom
no woman scientist alive
would risk,
risk for anything

no matter how lovely
no matter how tempting'

and so for the next supernova
month
Alex feasted in the present tense
and lived Hawaii with Phoebe
to the blood, bone and marrow.

Mauna Kea

Her brain shouldn't be doing
this

after the obligatory
twenty-four hours
at nine thousand feet
it shouldn't be
at fourteen thousand feet
this giddy

like looking at a whirring galaxy
in the lurid-lolly colours of infra-red
with a hangover

perhaps she hadn't anticipated
this racy religious awe
hung upside down
drooling nauseously
in her aching head.

But no suck
on an oxygen bottle

could calm
the giddy magnificence
of these observatory domes
bedded in lava litter
growing like glinting bulbs
from the peak
of this frozen volcano

no munch of chocolate
fumbled with blue numb
hands,
could ease
the squeeze on her lungs
or make her heart's whirligig
stop.

Ode to Keck

Alex couldn't wait to share
with Phoebe
her oxygen-starved first night
at fourteen thousand feet
on the glorious Kect telescope.

Reading the eruptions
on Jupiter's pustular moon, Io,
she'd felt so searingly close
her eyes stung
in the wheezing steam
of Io's acrid sulfur flares.

Hugging her coffee cup
at nine thousand feet
Alex didn't care
that her piddly lunar volcanoes
were no match
for Phoebe's ultra-butth project,
an infra-red zoom
to the black-hole core
of the Milky Way.

In the thawing bliss
of her new lover's face
Alex didn't care
she would never be a match
for Phoebe
in anything at all.

Married

Hawaii
never made Alex forget
she was married

she still grinned
on the phone to Daniel
relishing the salty savagery
of his jokes

a style of humour

bewildering to Phoebe's
good-natured Yankee
self-content.

Alex floated in the fantasy,
as lulling as the gorgeous
Pacific,
that she had everything—

a terrific marriage
with a funny devoted clever
man

plus
for the finite time being
(and god she was going to enjoy it)
an intoxication
a Bali Ha'i secret island
with a brilliant foreign lesbian
so sexy, so independent,
whom she'd never see again.

There were cakes
you could eat and have,
there were reefs
where the sharks came in
to be fed and tickled.

The Hawaiian octopus
Alex watches Phoebe's strong legs
flashing ahead of her
in the warm aqua reef off Kaua'i

and luxuriates
in the amniotic fluid
of sea. lover. wonder.

Watching Phoebe's white-fleshed
splash
she could be a reef shark
harmless but oh so watchfully
hungry

until she senses something
eyeing her
and her masked face turns
into the gaze
of a large octopus.

Its eerie
awareness.

not like the dopey butterfly fish
dangling around her
like a marine-themed mobile.

Amazing.
but all over
in a lightning second
dense with two sparking
nervous systems

the octopus vanishing
as if its brain waved a wand
fizzling
this tentacled lump
into the rock of the reef.

But Alex can hear
through the lull of the water
in her own brain's
deep stem
an unmistakable octopus
growl

now
under her floating flippers
a bit of reef,
old coral, patchy white weed,
is octopus.

Suddenly the rock breathes.

But when their optic nerves lock
again
the octopus jets off
backwards.

Bali Ha'i

Phoebe's fingers wake Alex up
the next morning

the mountain and the sea
out their five-star resort window
enchanted in a blue haze

but something is crawling
through Alex's brain
leaving a fiery black track
like a lightning strike

the octopus?

no.
but it smelt of sea

as did Phoebe's skin
plastering to hers
deliciously

but now the creature's tentacles
are coldly electric

taking her away from the safe earth
of sex

taking her, dragging her now
in its mollusc-like beak,
to her fate of sea,
a cold alien sea

Europa.

Mango daiquiri

That last drink with Phoebe
was a mango daiquiri

drunk in the warm, fragrant dusk
of sea level

the rain was beating down
like a muffled drum

they had the bar
by the pool
almost to themselves

they were talking
in the languid spell
of their sweet potent drinks
about sweet nothing

She never

Phoebe never rang, wrote
nor replied to a few feeler
e-mails from Alex

red-raw longing
glowed
under their excruciating
Memory Lane flirting
like trapped lava

over the years
it had been
a lot easier for Alex
to hate Phoebe
than forget her.

Flames

She was kidding herself
to call Phoebe
an old flame

more an old wound
a dribbling smoulder
a humiliating confusion.

And Alex wearily knew
that conferences
were tar pits
for the restlessly married

which isn't you
her warm wedding ring
reassures her
with the welcome chain
of the domestic flame.

America—The Adjective

Phoebe at the podium
is so American.

Articulate.
Impossible to believe
she has a molecule
of stuttering humanity.

Territorial.
Her mind not only knows
but owns
the cosmos.

Vulgar.
Spruiking her quasars, her black holes
and galaxies
like Big Mac Specials.

Puritanical.
Fiddling
with the fussy little buttons
over her breasts.

Narcissistic.

Thighs
belly, breast and bum
gym-perfect.

Insular.
No mysteries left.
Phoebe, why bother looking out
the window?
Why bother looking at me?

Everywhere, everyone
is just waiting
to become America.

Even your mighty quasars
on the fiery edge of time
will learn to wear
their galaxy-gorging jets
base-bloody-ball
backwards.

Adultery
She's changed.
Older, paler.
Even—why are my eyes gobbling
her up!—brown spots
on her hands.

But it's Phoebe.
Still Phoebe.

I still shiver
in the icy gaze
of her pale clever eyes.

And my old desire wakes up
like a desiccated Martian
flood plain
sniffing a huge fresh flood.

What new germs
will her lightning strikes
spark
in my parched thin soil?

Does she have my room number?

Daniel. *Daniel.*

My husband's name
is no amulet

against this fever

this fever
that makes me fret and sweat

while my heart divides
and procreates.

Black water

Let my fears drown
as they slip under
the ice lid and fall
ripe for illumination
into this liquid warm
claustrophobia

where my eyes must smell
as I jet like a nautilus
into the panoramic unimaginable.

Two-pot screamer

It's not just
being pissed

it's her
being with her

it's my button

can't blame her
too easy

she doesn't push it

I push her
to push it

It Never Happened

Deliciously
ill at ease
Alex sits in a hotel room
telling herself
It Never Happened

there is no need
for self-recrimination
or counting her Daniel
blessings

It Never Happened

Phoebe did not
kiss her.
seriously. kiss her.

she remembers
it was a good cold
four hundred years
between supernovae

better to believe
It Never Happened
than live and glow
in that annihilating bang.

Driving to Venus

She's not driving
like an icy comet
burning up
to Phoebe

it's early morning
serenely dark
she's driving to the airport
incandescently
on too little sleep

there's a crisp silence
clearing her path
to the pale dark sky's
only star.

Venus.
Wide-eyed lovely awake
prodding her
with love's luminescence.

Bugs and bitters

And when Alex gets home late
stubbing her toe
on guilt
and heady satiation

she doesn't know
whether to wince
or grin
with sloppy idiotic pleasure

she's been downing
an alien bitters
and its bugs are taking her
over.

The Kraken Sleepeth

In the abysmal depths of sleep
something quivers and stirs
on Alex's steaming ocean floor

let me be

Too driven by curiosity to ever
run cold
Alex's blood trembles in its tracks

turn it off

But her mind is too greedy
to give back the dark
and she holds the cruel beam steady

*you've got what you want
my peace this conversation*

And something thrashes
to the surface

and leaves its message floating
rank in Alex's breath

remember where you found me

Black holes gig

My heart is exploding.
In two days she'll be here.
In my city, in my blood
stream.

A fellowship at Melbourne Uni.

'A black holes gig'
she said laughing
over the phone.

And I feel my whole universe
squeeze and shrink
as it falls joyfully
in.

Never forget

Alex knows
she will never forget
how beautiful Phoebe looks
standing before a dark mirror

wrapped in a pale blue motel towel
looking back at her.

Alex notes everything.

Phoebe's long naked legs.
Her own cold feet in the cold sheets
wanting Phoebe to come back
and thaw them.
Her nipples still warmly moist
from Phoebe's tongue.
The drawn dusty curtains.
The ugly print
of a blue and yellow St Kilda.
Phoebe's eyes. Phoebe's eyes.

The beast

'It could just as easily
have been called
The Semen Way'
Phoebe tells me
in her sharp dirty way.

We're lying under a rug
somewhere
outside Ballarat
by a murmuring invisible river.

The Milky Way streaming
and sparkling over
our heads
is making me happily
bereft of smart competitive
metaphors.

'Milky? It's not a dear old moo cow
up there.
There's a beast, a real beast,
at the centre of our galaxy
but it's no domesticated pet.
It roars in gamma rays
from its black hole lair
of a million crushed suns.
And one day, babe,
all those pretty stars
blue, red and brindle
and all who sail on them
will pour down
its black gullet
and disappear forever.'

Snuggling into Phoebe's warm side
I grin at her horror story

nearby in the swampy smell
frogs are making a wonderful
racket.

The wonder

she must love me

she must love me

Alex's heart thumps
as Phoebe
takes her hand
and holds it in the hollow
between her breasts

with the last residue
of adult restraint
Alex holds her silence
and lets the rapture
in Phoebe's softly American
spider voice
hold her in its spinning silk

'Astronomers are the chosen ones,
darling,
how can anyone go out at night
look up
and not want to be one of us?

I wet myself once
because I couldn't leave the telescope
because I was looking back
to the beginning of time.
I was looking at the real dragons, Alex,
quasars with blow-torch jets
as long as three galaxies.
I love knowing
what those monsters don't.

They're extinct.
Nothing survives.

You grow up the minute
you don't take this universe
too seriously,
but the wonder, the gog-eyed wonder,
never goes away.'

The hardy limpet

And then she picks my hand

off her chest
as if it were a clinging
stray.

I hear that old grunt
of restless boredom
and whatever closeness we had
is over.

But I'm still listening,
still hearing her whirring awe
still feeling the pressure
of her fingers.

I know why I love this
dazzling woman.

So what
she's as remote from my frailties
as her blazing quasars.

She makes me stand
in the breath of her hot hard
truths.

Marital sex

I am not lying in my enemy's
arms.

Why am I heartsore
for the sound and smell
of a war in my bed?

Daniel's baby-soft curls
smell as dear as ever
as he sucks my breasts.

Do I really want a whiff
of sour wine
and gunpowder,
an asteroid called Eros
crashing through my roof?

Oxygen

'Oxygen'
Phoebe chants
like a smirking curse
'there won't be enough
oxygen'

As always

she's right.

Europa's ice crust
shutting out the sun
could be a coffin lid
for anything bigger
than an anaerobic bug.

Oxygen.
And my mind bubbles
into a blue aquarium,
shining with gulping fish,
alit like the translucent tail
of a fluttery male sea horse
his belly bulging with eggs.

Sun-rich water,
and all its living loot.

While Phoebe's finned jibe
cold-eyed and hungry
cruises Europa's black water
hunting down
all my vulnerable wonders.

Radiation

When
pushing back strands
of her hair straying
around her dangerous
quick-quipping mouth

kissing her
feeling her mouth open
like an anemone
under mine

when I flow to her
fast and shallow
like a channel
from a deep lagoon
frothing across to the sea

I have her intense attention.

It's only afterwards
wearily driving home
I feel my skin
flake away
in a leprous snowfall

as if I've strayed
and played
in Jupiter's radiation belt.

Romantic

Phoebe tells me
I'm such a romantic
I should be writing poetry
on purple paper
(would Daniel laugh harder
at the poetry or the paper?)

But, Phoebe says,
being romantic
is not cute or clever
for a female astronomer.

Phoebe has all the grim statistics
at her feminist fingertips
about the women
who chose a man
over the mission,
the appointment,
or telescope time.

Of course
lesbians like herself

could be the foolhardiest
romance junkies of all,
chucking hard-won careers
away on a whim, a fling,
a pretty face
in an exotic place

but not her not her

sure she likes me,
the wild starry talking
the great sex
and, oh yeah, the laughs

but. she was warning me.
come crunch time
she. Phoebe.
would be. without apology.
a man.

The jellyfish

In her husband's glass
through the finger-marked frost

Alex watches
a whirling jellyfish
dissolving slowly
in his wine

lovely
translucent
trapped

a clinking dead end.

wild surmise

Alex had long and ruefully
known
that only sensational astrophysical
discoveries
could make Phoebe really tremble

but she herself was still
reeling
from Phoebe's breaking into poetry
like a dry salt lake suddenly
spouting fresh water

'I'm staring
like Keats's *stout Cortez* staring
for the first time at the Pacific'
Phoebe had said
with wet flashing eyes

'I'm staring
at a great new ocean,
an invisible ocean
pulsing and repulsing

like a black high tide
through the universe

dark energy.
it exists, Alex,
this Hubble pic proves it.

look, this supernova
is just too damn bright

it proves the universe
is expanding,
but not steadily

gravity and my ocean
of dark energy

are fighting it out'

then Phoebe looked at Alex
with a wild surmise.

Daniel's Song

My wife reads the world
with a long-distance microscope.

How does she read me
squatting on her toes
pressing my kneecaps in?

My heart signals to her
like a colossal rapacious
alien
flashing frantically
from an overlooked moon.

oh darling oh my love
find me find me

a green Thought in a green shade

My garden is not Paradise
but it's a small-time Eden
of sorts.

And like Marvell
I can revel in its
green embrace
without missing its Mistress
too unbearably much.

Is he right in arguing
with such lusciously lonely
metaphysical wit
that it's best
to wander solitary?

Do any of us really
have much choice?

The marvel of a ripening lemon
can't be shared any better
than the bone-scratching terror
of cancer.

We're all alone.

Perhaps it's the only way
to really feel

your own pulse
of green poetry.

Hanging Rock

Dawdling behind his wife
through the clefts of damp
eerie smelling rocks
Daniel thinks enviously
of Oedipus,
ground to his life's halt
at Colonus,
when the earth gently opened
beneath his feet.

Panting a little
behind his wife's long
restless stride,
Daniel remembers walks
when they jostled shoulders
on narrow bush tracks
deliriously together
never thinking
to walk in single file.

How long ago?
five years
or ten?

Now a gang of acned
stomping yobs
suddenly, like a pipe
gushing raw sewage,
bursts down
the path

'They're everywhere'
Daniel snarls
like a cornered old dog
'the dickbrains.
they're winning.'

Alex turns around
she's glowing eyes
all laughing lava

'We're standing on
an old volcano, darling'

a zigzagging flash
of crimson rosellas
erupts over their heads

‘and volcanoes always
have the last word.’

The cradle

Alex turns over and over
in her hot grabby mind
the images from the Pilbara rocks
Rachel Epstein, microbiologist
and good friend,
blew up for her.

Three-billion-year-old threads.
Delicate skeletons.
Sulfur guzzling microbes
from an ancient thermal spring
when the young earth seethed
and boiled.

Life was spawned in Hell.
Jubilant
it thrived and multiplied
and danced
in the scalding
stench.

like love

Alex's breasts prickle

What was mewling
what was crying out
from the fiery cold cradle
of Europa
to suck her milk?

The kiss of bacteria

‘If I kissed you properly
on the mouth’
Rachel speculates
with sexless wonder
staring with her unblinking scientific
gaze
at Alex's lips
‘we'd make such an interesting
bacterial swab together’

Alex suddenly imagines
their kiss
sliced into an exquisitely tiny
section

for Rachel's electron microscope

and their unlikely pash
magnified half a million times
into the sinister unsentimental geometry
of Rachel's world, the real world—
black-hearted rods and spheres.

Under the ice

Holding ice
in your bare hand
hurts

but Alex is an ice
fanatic

her burning hands trembling
compulsively over her computer keys
as they scan Europa
every day for evidence
of ice volcanoes.

Just as she is longing
for evidence
of Phoebe's spectacular eruptions—

what is really under her ice?
what wriggling wonder
would spurt one day
from under Phoebe's ice-hard
eyes
and splash all over Alex?

Oh happy day
when her heart's sky
burns and burns
with the searing display
of her two most precious moons
generously erupting!

Prickling

Daniel curls around me
soft as a mollusc
in his sleep

insomnia prickles like a sea urchin
and grows
into a toothache
of Phoebe's mouth
dissolving into mine

I try to shut
this worn old porn off
and instead
send my mind
as a submersible
to Europa

let me dream
clusters of tube worms
growing like Medusa hair
into white curlers

let me gag on a cloud
of giant squid's ink

anything
but abducting myself
on a sterile fantasy
mindlessly masturbating
on a woman
who despises me.

Pretty rats

‘What are you?’

Phoebe asks
taking Alex's long blazing face
in her hand

‘are you just a wife, honey,
a very nice man's philandering wife?’
then kisses Alex
seriously slowly

‘despite having the loveliest mouth
in the world
you make a shit-awful lesbian, Alex,
I'd be a fool
to get too fond of you,
if she wasn't so ugly
your dyke pal, Rachel,
would be a much smarter
bet'

enjoying the closeness
of Phoebe's breath and lips
Alex plays along

‘Rachel's asexual, not a lesbian,
I've only ever known her
to cuddle up
with her pet rat, Shigella,

mind you,
he's a very pretty rat'

'What are you then?'
Phoebe croons stroking
Alex's dark fine brows
'what are you?'

Alex closes her eyes
trembling into the caress
anything you fancy
your exploding star.
your pygmy hippopotamus.
anything. anything. you fancy

Black smokers
I can withstand
this.

Black smokers
come and go.

And their colonies
of sulfur glutton bacteria
and heat junkie worms
move on.

I can withstand
her.

Let me be an iron-deaf
seabed
that will not fold
at the hot lick of her voice

not crack
at the magma push
of her touch

not let her
thermal boiling memory poison
through.

Dark matter
Phoebe knows how
to make my European microbe
look ordinary

the Are We Alone debate
only makes her jeer
'I like being alone'

my lover is a more ambitious hunter,
her prey
the universe's invisible guts
dark matter
that neither emits nor absorbs
ordinary light

gravity
its only spoor.

Towards its mystery
towards its maw
Phoebe is willingly,
almost wantonly,
drawn.

When Venus erupted

Tonight Venus is tauntingly
beautiful
as she drops from the lilac
twilight sky
into my glass of wine

I'm drinking too much, Phoebe

my stomach just rains acid
when it tries to digest you.

When Venus erupted
she was smothered in lava
when Venus erupted
all her oceans boiled away

did she harbour life?
did she turn fiercely sterile
to spite herself?

All affairs are like this.

You choke on your own run-away
gases.
You die
of excitement.

Invitation to the abyss

Rachel swats the invitation
at my face

'we're off to the ball
on the East Pacific Rise

ocean floor,
eight hours cramped together
in a sub, Alex'

A feast on the gushing abyss.
gobbling at incredible pressure
my favourite party food—
life at its most exotic unlikely.

Time out.
Precious and fantastic.
From Daniel's caressing
nudging attentiveness.
And Phoebe's offhand
lust.

Rapture of the Deep

The submersible is sinking
through the layers
of sea,
like a brave roving thought
sinking to the bottom
of a black dream.

Rachel is noisily watching
the silent deep water
fireworks,
as translucent killers
flash blue and red X rays
for mates or meat.

While Alex is impatiently waiting
for euphoria,
even a dangerous narcosis,
to kick in.

Black and hot and cold

Rachel's excited oxygen-greedy
breath
smells of peanuts

'we're here we're here'

Alex's long left leg
is cramping

the tiny sub's window
is black.

Before the frail light
is switched dimly on,

before her own eyes
can gorge,
Alex's mind rips and splits
like the ocean floor

and black lava bubbles
rear up
in a hiss of challenge

of life about to be spawned
in her own boiling cold dark.

Real

A white octopus appears suddenly
like a tentacled ghost
at the window

Alex imagines her own hand
mulched by the pressure
as she reaches out
to touch it.

Underneath them
bacteria blanket the rocks
like a dark dawn
glittering with frost

but Alex won't wake up
and crow

she leaves the breathless
gush
to Rachel.

And even the pearly worms
draped over the stones
like strands of spaghetti
only remind her of the pasta
she left congealing in cold tasteless
white sauce
the last time she saw Phoebe.

'Even the shrimps are blind
down here'
Rachel murmurs
'it's a different kind of sensitivity
that matters'

sensitivity
Alex's skin crawls
with yearning

and she imagines putting her face
under the rock pipe
spitting hot sulfurous water
and giving her skin something
real
to agonise over.

The solar wind

On the pitch-black ocean floor
Phoebe was still battering
Alex's psychic atmosphere

while Rachel's tiny, small-mouthed
face,
impersonating a happy *Pompeii* worm
poking out of its tube,
was talking about the latest
black smoker fashion statement
'bacterial shaggy coats'.

Alex felt like the surface of Mercury,
coatless in its scorching orbit,
irradiated beyond rescue.

Death and Destruction

in the abyss *over the edge*
she can't wait
a knot
unravelling in her gut

her eyes anticipate
a wild eerie overload

the sub's puny headlights
switch on
and milkily sweep
the ocean floor

but
she blinks
but
there's nothing
but
black charred
nothing

the water has killed
everything
like black suffocating oil

the water hates life
the seafloor grins
black and glassy

the pilot is enjoying himself
rubbing their noses in it
the little sub lingers
rubbernecking
over the steaming
lifeless wreck

‘a new volcano's handiwork’
he says proudly

‘they giveth they taketh away’
Rachel's breath erupts
awesomely in Alex's ear.

Going dead boat

The submersible settles on the seafloor
and the smirking pilot
shuts down all systems

‘we call it
going dead boat’

his voice drifts thin
in the pounding silence

and a kind of DTs settles on me
as I see through the pitch black
the sides of the sub
sweating worms

and even without Rachel's
hot dry hand clutching mine
I know everything
steel rock water

is alive
and teeming beyond my
endurance

Mister Hyde

Phoebe glances at Rachel's worm
photos from the vents
and shuddering
pushes them away

‘Jesus, Alex, imagine those
repulsive things

a thousand times bigger
just waiting for your meddling naiveté
down in the European mud.'

Her fear is a show of sexy weakness
and makes me know
we'll be going to bed soon
and sets off my own
unfightable quivering.

I'd be happy,
I tell her,
drifting into her eyes,
to find a few cute bugs

'Bullshit.
You're just another Doctor Jekyll
poking, prying
and hoping.

Christ knows what toxic Mister Hyde
your blundering ice probe could find
and free.'

Singularity

Is the point where Phoebe has
infinite power.

I am dead. While watching myself
fall towards her.

Stripped to subatomic particles
I am dead. But faster than the speed
of light.

I moan *I am dead*. Through the infinitely hot
point of no return.

The War of the Worlds

*no one would have believed
no one gave a thought*

Did Alex ever believe
give a thought
to lying in the oily tentacles
of a mesmerising Martian?

*across the gulf of space
intellects vast and cool
and unsympathetic*

Across the gulf of Phoebe's bed
two nauseating eyes regard Alex
with a vast and cool
and unsympathetic intelligence

Elwood Beach

This morning, after falling through
the seven heavens of Li Po's
wine and waterfall poetry,
Daniel takes a falling leaf
from the poet's book,
and gorging on idleness
gulps down the sunny breeze
whiffy with rotting seaweed
and white-crested lapping
memory.

Two glittering demons stroll
towards him,
his old self with Alex,
hand in hand.

He shields his eyes
from the glare
of their happiness
and tranquilly
lets their distant-past bliss
wash over him.

He is not here
to go crazy.

Dogshit on the path.
Its swarming stink
no heart-hurting phantom.

Nothing like fresh dogshit
to make the present
punch back.

Greasy Joe's

Why does Memory Lane
never lose the sizzling savour
of junk food?

Chips and hamburgers.
Greasy fingers.
Steamy windows.
Parked by a frothing
St Kilda Beach in winter.
That sweet old pressure

against the zipper.

Oh Alex.

And so I find myself hooked
and drifting through the door
towards that siren smell
of Greasy Joe's—
fug, beer and burgers.

I have a quiet but urgent dream
of a piled plate, a schooner,
a spot of early Yeats
and a romantic glutton's peace.

Am I
choking on yellow gas
and now seeing
devils?

Alex and ... who?
Some sharp-faced
bitch
holding my wife's hands.

My devils
haven't seen me.
They only see,
only bedazzle,
each other.

Am I in Hell?
or the most noxious terrace
of Purgatory
where you grin and sing and bear
it

because why?
you'll learn to love it.
your own holy poison.

Oh Alex.
I've mushed
into grey cold slop
sloshing itself tidily
out the door
to the filthy street.

Right out of your fucking way.

Living with it

caught in a grey cloud
I can't rain
caught on Punt Road
I can't crash

there is oyster grit
in my eye

it's my wife's shattered
aphrodisiac

should I weep it away
or live with it
and go blind?

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is obvious
and, like cancer, the question
is the same
how long have I got?

Of course there are other questions
blooming like blue-green algae
in the river of my happily meandering
marriage
how long have you been seeing her?
do you like her cunt better than my cock?

Or maybe I need a second opinion.
A mate to tell me I'm seeing things,
it's benign
just two old girlfriends catching up.

But I don't have mates
like that any more.
My last few years have been
furiously spent, trying not
to gut Brian Howard slowly
with a rusty fishing knife,
trying to keep my job.

Not to mention the usual blokey
laziness
my wife's my best friend
christ knows she's not
when did we last forget the time
just talking?

The diagnosis is clear.
My marriage is cactus.

This is my Gallipoli.
Just hit the beach shooting.

Virus

She must be miserable,
she's not throwing her coffee down
like her throat's made of asbestos,
instead she's staring at it
as if I've just poured her a cup
of hot poison.

If I were a stronger
better man
I'd bring this whole unsaid mess
to the boil
and make her drink it.

I sip my coffee
joylessly
(when did I last enjoy anything?)
and ask about her work.

She shrugs

'sometimes it feels
like I've got herpes,

it lives dormant
in my nerves
then tingles
and burns to the surface
in itching little ulcers,
then it goes away again
but there's no cure, Daniel,
I've got it for life'

we're both laughing
joylessly
we both know
she's not talking
about Europa.

Extremophiles

I can't read Plath any more.

But she's still the only poet
my wife reads
or knows.

Other poets I've urged on her
are 'crap' or 'boring'.

So why does Plath escape
my wife's exacting critique?

Alex just laughs
'Sylvia's an extremophile'

What does she mean?
Thermal vent poetry?
Writhing curses
stinking of sulfur?

Or is Plath just the smelly black music
playing behind

my wife's feeding frenzy
on her secret girlfriend's bubbling
germs?

If my wife can only love
the boiling extreme
she can't
of her own willing accord
love me

Cold (1)

How can she live
such a cold life?

Even her working thoughts
swarm and swim
through a dead cold universe.

What kind of creature
thrives on the cold?

Maybe Phoebe is the germ
I'll discover
when I pick Europa's
ice-jammed lock

and like the swooning
mug maiden
I've invited my own
infectious vampire in.

Cold (2)

How can she live
such a cold life
my distant wife?

I watch her
like I watch
the cold August wind
tossing
the blossoming pink
magnolia tree.

I watch her
because frozen sea
or blown early spring bloom
she's precious to me.

Cider

All it takes is one delicious sip.

And he floats apple-cider sweetly
back
into the twentieth century.

He tastes every note
of the 60s and 70s
as his forty-nine-year-old bones creak
blissfully along
to the pub's archaic jukebox.

And he imagines falling in love
with his wife again
where every raven
on every telegraph pole
becomes blue-black shimmering
beautiful
and frilled with significance

where music and grog
weave a glassy green wave

swelling over the sandbar
to take him salt-faced
and joyful
into the remembering
long white beach of her.

Another sip
his mouth fills with cider poetry.
And he can smell the apple-blossom
in an ecstatic scrap of Sappho.

He presses his friendly wet male nose
against the glass of that ancient lesbian's
bittersweet aching blundering bliss
for one sweetly sodden moment.

Until a big sour burp wakes him up
to just another
whingeing old dyke.

Tedious, tedious Sappho
wringing her inky hands
on another lilac twilight
under her pronged toxic evening star

praying pleading
yet bloody again
to lie in some cold girl's
arms

just like his wife.

Just like his wife
swigging on her twenty-first century
strychnine
of sterile planets
and parching women.

Malaise

Rock'n'roll is dead.

There's an endless mid 70s
guitar solo
boring, twanging on
and on and on
in me.

Is this stale
no-talent noise
telling me something?

*I'm your requiem, pal.
Move over. Go quietly.
Drop dead.*

Daniel's view

My inner eye
is shuddering
at the view

but is trying to let
me down gently

*it's nothing, mate,
just a garden variety
gut ache*

but I know
there's a monster
on the march

whose lumps are growing
into a thorny randy parasite
eyeing me
relentlessly off.

Living organism
Daniel tells Alex
what the doctor said

and she thinks
of taking his hand

but doesn't.

Instead she concentrates
on not fainting

she's horrified at herself

it's not as if he's bleeding
all over her.

He's his usual
eloquently contained self

just white-faced.

Her brave frightened
man

is not a computer-animated
proto-trilobite

or an extraterrestrial
roving probe
bristling with immortal
intelligence.

He's a complex vulnerable
living organism

that's faltering
and turning fatally
on itself

and,

forget the human miracle
of the amazing neural galaxy
in his skull,
beyond her help.

Hospital

What poet will accompany me
to hospital?

Cavafy?

No. I'm too terrified
for a neo-pagan poof's
uncomforting meditations
on falling on your sword,
with stiff upper lip
twitching to a divine music
as the gods pull up their pegs ...

Dickinson?

No. She always insists
like a kind of spinster Lear
that you live in the prickling
lace-work
of her lunaticking storms.

Keats?

No. His whingeing is too
lush
and no hospital bed can bear
that many anaesthetising
flowers.

Oh God.
I'm so frightened.

My coffee. My beloved
Melbourne libation
just tastes of ether.

But when I sleep
when I sleep
to be cut open
to be cut to raw and bloody pieces
I will wake to pain
and catheters.

To banal strangers.
The callous good cheer

of surgeons.

Of course.
I will take Dante.

Dante and I will weep
together
as the leopard and the lion
and the gaunt grey wolf
all take their bite
and the Dark Wood
tangles us together
in a brotherhood
of shivering necessity.

Oh Dante.
Wrap me close
in your warm brave eloquence.

Marlowe

But it is Marlowe
who comforts me best
in this gnawing distress
of post-operative chemo.

Marlowe, my sweetly fiendish cat,
whose fragrant beauty
could launch a thousand
I-want-to-live
ships.

My lovely boy.

Not the swaggering pederast
poet
dying with a dagger
in his recklessly brazen atheist
eye.

My blue Burmese
lying like a lover
in my arms

purring with green eyes shut
as if my love
is a flickering fire, a warm mouse.

And then he gets
sick of that, sick of me
and bites.

If only my wife,
waiting on me anxious,
guilty
hand and bloody foot,
could love me
as blissfully, as truthfully,
as my cat.

Bald

This look
is the bald truth.

I have cancer.
I'm on chemo.
My hair has fallen out.

The mirror
in its usual cruel glassy drawl
tells me the look
does nothing for me.

Wispy fuzz. A few skull warts.
And my eyes look lost.
Lost their warrior lustre.

My curls were clearly
my balls.

Cancer is my Delilah
shearing me unmaning me
while I dozed my days away

slobbering in the seductive lap
of my body's own fake wellbeing.

You never know from where
your enemies will spring.

Mine, the deadliest,
came with a razor
from within.

Resistance

I am resisting
the slow cold descent
into Hell.

I don't ask my doctor
how long have I got?
I don't ask Alex
who are you seeing?

I'm enjoying
hatching
the red flower-spiders
on my new grevillea

and hope one
will jump on me
like a benign funnel-web
and change my luck.

Most comforting of all
I'm sleeping in
with my old mate Dante

and holding his vibrating hand.

Breakfast

It's strange the scraps
of crap you pick up—

bits and pieces
of smart-arse nothing
like cramming
for a game show
that holds no surprises
or prizes.

Am I getting nastier?

Or is cancer
the excuse I've always
been looking for?

No matter how dreadful
I feel
or how much Alex tries
to notice or care
there's always this
little hum

coming off her
like a nauseating odour
of happiness.

Well, this morning
over a breakfast,
that will sit in my constipated
gut
like concrete,
I will tell her

what I've just read
christ-knows-where
about her Giordano Bruno
astrobiology's Head Martyr—

they burnt him
for not acknowledging
the divinity of Jesus

not, my deluded love,
for waving the extraterrestrial
flag

he was just another
crazy heretic mug
dying in agony
for a medieval
hair-splitting pointless
nothing.

That might just smother
for a moment
the hum
of her horrible pity.

The corporate world
Daniel doesn't hesitate
crossing the threshold
of Alex's study

he trembles a little
standing in her dusty
charged space

and gripes
with envy
at its smell of creative
industry.

He flicks
at her astronomy calendar
baring his teeth
at Europa

'you fucking nothing
of a grubby golf ball'

But stopping at
the floating blue jewel
of Earth
he rubs his bony

unshaved jaw
and shudders

lucky lucky Alex

the gorgeous freedom
to limitlessly itch
her own thoughts

let her try
sublime floating in black
fertile space
one whole day
in his corporate world
of the user-pays university

let her try
to mentally melt
the ice cap of her stubborn moon
while admin e-mail

nags and bites
like sandflies

that blue dot jewel
would snap in her fingers
like a junk plastic heart
listening to one more
slack-arse illiterate
student
demanding a Distinction
for one more scrap
of crapulous cyberfiction
or worse
yet another
lazy dead poem.

Maybe it had given him cancer,
giving in
giving up
giving the little fuckers
what they insisted their money
had bought them.

Meanwhile
he had contempt, chemo
and his wife's e-mail password ...

while lucky lucky Alex
was out
fucking

the stars.

Infidelity by e-mail

Christ, she's stupid.

Daniel can't believe
his wife's password
is really *Europa*.

For a moment he trickles
reluctance.

Maybe it shows
she has nothing to hide.

Or thinks he's
fucking stupid.

Europa Europa

He'll blast that moon
to mush.

Or is Europa
her only mistress?

He could live with that.
You can't fuck ice.

But within seconds
he's howling for ice
with the screaming need
of a burns victim.

Her Inbox
is her trysting love nest.

Her stink-hole.

The endearments crawl
into Daniel's eyes
like maggots.

But from under the scalding fug
one name surfaces
and floats
like a big black turd
that will never flush away.

Phoebe.

First cigarette

Was the chemo killing
his fire
rather than fighting his tumour?

Was coming into work
a mistake?

His computer screen
an unappetising nag
of unanswered e-mail.

fuck off everyone
I've got cancer

Boring voices
in the corridor,
Daniel sighs
and drags himself up
to shut the door

it makes a satisfying
fuck-off bang

he shuts down his computer
and breathes in
silence

and contemplates again,
like his tongue obsessively
poking a new ulcer,
the state of his marriage.

He tries to remember
the smell of his wife's hair,
her head snuggling
into his shoulder in bed
while she was dozing
off to sleep

now she just made
his shoulder ache
but he was too lonely
or paralysed
to shove her off.

There was something
charmless

about his wife's latest
infidelity

no grand passion
just a dog (a stupid bitch)
returning to the vomit
of an addictive old girlfriend

the kiss, root n' tell
of their panting e-mail.

Daniel's hands shake
then clench

today, right now,
he was going to have
his first cigarette
in eleven years.

Alex wasn't the only one
who liked to suck
what was bad for her.

Prayer

What would Larkin say
in his sour-quatrain perfect
way
about how Brian Howard
orders his coffee?

Macchiato.
With his crooked pinkie
little jug of hot milk
on the side.

And how much
grim and nasty Philip
would enjoy
this grey bleak day,
spiced and sprinkled with
the waiter's junkie pallor
and Brian Howard's corporate
logorrhoea.

Today I don't even have
the eloquence
of sycophancy.

Nor the flash-flood fight
left to say

*mate, I just want to fail
the fucking lot of them*

Just a prayer.
A simple prayer
as my own coffee bubbles
unfriendly
under the waistband of my saggy
jocks.

I pray for Brian Howard
to die.
now.
without benefit
of morphine or clergy.

I pray for my own repulsive
present
to depart and cease.

That's all.
Like the true Larkin hero,
oh so creepy,
I've never dared to be greedy.

There's always one
There's always one.

And this one
a woman of course
Liz Monday
my age
and looking every minute of it
despite the slash
of loud pink lipstick.

And why is she more work
than the rest of the class
slapped together?
Dear dumb little things
who'd root their mothers
for a good mark.

Why does Liz fucking Monday
lie
that she's read every single book
ever aborted
let alone published?

‘120 Days of Sodom?’
I tried calling her bluff

she didn't even stop rustling

her infernally noisy notes

'twice'
she replied
'the second time in the original
Italian'

Gotcha!

But I refrained
from rustling my own notes
and pompously correcting her
'the Marquis de Sade wrote
in *French*, Liz'

I'm finally learning.

Instead I've been giving her
her head
letting her talk at ignorant length
about books she's never read

and even better
her own masterpieces
the intricate hard labour
behind every flat-footed
boring word

while the rest of the class
is too comatose
to challenge me, her,
or care.

But one day Liz Monday
will wake up
out of her garrulous conceited
torpor
and know she's been got at

and then
and only then
she'll pen
her best work, her passionate
tour de force

a letter to Brian Howard
her match in this world
and christ knows the next
accusing me of what?

perfidious

politically incorrect
scorn?

no.
she'll stick to this age's
favourite script.

she'll tell Brian
I've been harassing her
sexually harassing her.

poetry makes nothing happen
as it happens, Auden, my dear,
today you're right

nothing is happening

no poem will water my garden
or
make my wife fancy me
or
thread health's good oil
through my grinding gears

nothing is happening

you must have known days like this
when Kallman was drunk and impossible
when everything you touched
felt filthy

and your poems, unlucky bugger,
tipped out their ash and singeing embers
on your ugly clever head

and nothing happened

except you smelt
like something nasty
slowly burning.

Honeyeaters (1)
When you're fucked
take an old pleasure
and dive into it.

Today the honeyeaters
darting through the branches
of the apricot tree
are an empty swimming pool.

They don't even give me
a metaphor to swim in.

Just yapping little grey birds.

I can't blame cancer.
We're growing together
like an exhausted marriage.

Is it because I wanted to chain Alex
to her chair last night
and make her watch
really watch
this abused old working elephant's distress?

Because it was hurting me
like a blunt needle jabbed in
I wanted it to hurt her

*look you bitch look
what's happening to life
on your own planet*

she was smiling
smiling to herself not watching
the elephant's huge side
heaving with pain

her mind and heart
millions of miles away,
from me, the elephant
and the bloody TV,
chip chip chipping
at her dead little moon.

Click

I remember

there was a magnificent tree
through the dusty window
framing your glinting head

a giant gum
flaunting pink blossoms
swaying
like a showy dancer
waltzing by himself

when I knew
really knew, Phoebe,
you had never liked me.

Your back, as always,
to the view

your eyes
clicking over me
like a probe

processing images
from an insignificant moon
that holds no surprises.

Charged particles

Over breakfast
Alex is bombarding Daniel

'I love Jupiter
she just keeps making things
happen

her gravitational pull
is so sexy,
she gives the volcanoes on Io
the biggest and best
orgasms in the solar system

but it's her big-time radiation
that really turns me on.
Oh, her magnetic field
slams the ice of Europa
with charged particles
that can stir things up
like right-on-target sperm.
Europa could be pregnant, Daniel.'

Pregnant?
Daniel can't remember
which of them it was
who didn't want children

too late now.
christ knows what the chemo
was doing to his sperm count,
and when was the last time
he and Alex had sex anyway?

Pregnant?
Wasn't Alex nearly menopausal?

Maybe she could spend
the rest of her life

orbiting her pin-up Jupiter
and wait for those right-on-target
charged particles
to slam into her.

But wasn't Jupiter,
in nonsensical Alex-speak,
female?

Wouldn't it be just like Alex
to not only have the biggest and best
orgasms in the solar system
but then triumphantly trounce logic
and have a giant woman planet's baby?

Daniel's head
is aching horribly.

He wants to scream at his wife
and fall blubbering into his muesli.

Instead he waits for her
to shut up and notice, for her
to get to her bloody feet
come over
and for the first time in a very long while
touch him.

The Suicides' Wood

Dante, give me some credit.
I have not made my house
my gallows.

I don't hoard pills.

Nor does every fork
quivering in my hand
seek a faulty plug.

I'm eking out every moment
like a greedy kid spinning out
a bag of lollies.

I don't even know
when I'll be down
to my last musk stick.

Dante, give me some credit.
I'm growing tomatoes.
I'm smelling the rain.

I'm wearing my wife's
elsewhere itch.

Come what may.
Come what circle you find my soul
banqueting or anguishing.
I will not be your pitiful thornbush.

And my spirit will never
break away
black, bleeding and blubbering
in your sweet poet's
compassionate hand.

Mediocrity

There's something deafening
about mediocrity.

Today it's like
a tinnitus ringing
in my ears.

Grinding through the celebrity bullshit
magazines
in the dentist's waiting room
the ringing was torture.

I'm a failed academic.
A dinosaur humanist.
A cancer-ridden fucking joke
squeezing friendly old poems
for the juicy bits.

Alex, my bright distant darling,
I am your boring satellite
your minor planet

your unnamed moon
your black asteroid

with troglodyte habits
bad teeth
and the great struggling crippled nothing
of the mediocre
to offer.

The Circle of the Lustful

Why does Dante
comfort me so much
in this long distress?

Dante doesn't ask
for ice-thin stoicism,
his silly scared poet
weeps buckets
in front of nice Virgil.

This afternoon
I can't read

like a sticky sick kid
I'm looking at pictures

Blake's Dante

letting myself
linger
enviously

over the Circle
of the Lustful

Blake's Centrefold

until its whirling lovers
grab and grow
in my aching gut
like panting tumours.

Her kiss
Which lightning bolt
seared through me more?

Her kiss
or his cancer?

After both
I smelt burnt.

But it was the soft sear
of her mouth
that stood me on my tail
alive alive

like a parched fish
pleading for electrocution
in a thunderstorm.

Exquisite cholera
Alex is only slightly drunk
half-listening to Rachel's
enthralled afternoon's lab work

'Have you ever really looked
at the cholera bug?
it is so exquisite'

maybe it's the trigger
exquisite
maybe it's a memory neuron
with a sudden hit of alcohol
releasing its goodies
with a rush of groggy generosity

because there
in her heart's eye
stands Phoebe

not in those fragments
that had tormented Alex

when she was trying
to go back to sleep

not just an aroused nipple
or a swollen mouth
or a whisper

it's Phoebe
in *exquisite* clarity
down to her white shirt
and favourite jeans
and nicotine-stained finger

and her face
sharp as glass
the merciless colour of her eyes
and the sometimes self-conscious pout
of her mouth

she's looking straight at Alex
aware of her
as if nothing else in the world
existed or mattered

Alex shudders

it must mean something
she must go home
and wait by the phone

'Why does everyone go green
and quiet

when I talk about cholera?'

Alex raises her glass to Rachel
and lets out a long passionate
breath

'To cholera!'

Calamari

My wife gives her
blatantly impatient sigh
explaining to Brian Howard
and his bloody horrible wife, Joanne,
why she doesn't eat calamari

don't bother, darling
I think
feeling a strange fresh solidarity
with my Alex
don't bother just don't fucking bother

but she always does
even with dead-souled pricks
and stupid sneering bitches

this pair of fuckers
would eat their own kids
if you crumbed them nicely

I'm talking to her in my head
with more energetic love
than I've felt for months

while my mouth wears
the grim sloppy smile
of a gutless deadshit
taking his boss out
and fighting, every inch of the meal,
the urge to look at his watch

don't tell them
how you marvel at the octopus

tell me instead
about its large amazing brain
that flummoxes you
in a short-lived mollusc

tell me again, darling,
tell me again
the time you saw one

*lurking in a rock pool
until it jetted away
in a huff of pink*

*the only animal
that really shows its feelings,
you joked*

*don't bother showing yours, my love,
to this pair ...*

Brian guffaws crunching
on his calamari rings,
Joanne makes a show
of shuddering

and some infinity of torture
later
I take out my credit card.

The partial eclipse
Through her binoculars
one side of the glowing moon
is blotched
with dark mossy seas

she lets her fancy
dog-paddle
before her gaze shifts
to the black egg eclipse

and yielding to the invitation
of all shadows
she hatches monsters

trembling
before she pulls her pieces together
to face her husband.

You must
you must change your life

I heard you, Rilke,
loud and clear and
contemptuous

you must
what? tell her.
what?
when she comes in
from mooning over

that dead yellow rock
tell her.

you must
say.
you hate her with all your.
what?

you must
cut to the fucking chase
for once in your dithering
academic life

treat it like an illness.
the Greek poets knew.
like she's running a mortal fever.
oh christ, if only she'd die.
did the Greeks know about hatred
too?

give that woman up.
or I'll kill you.

oh she won't believe her gentle
Daniel
said that
not Daniel
with his balls dangling from his apron
as he cooks the great woman's
dinner

you must
stand by me, Rilke.

Daniel's angel

Daniel paces the floor
like Rilke himself
on the battlements of Duino
an ecstatic lightning rod
buffeted in a gale, filling with poems
from his angel's storming mouth

and likewise
Daniel's angel paces with him
giving him a fluency
that if he could just stop
for one rapt second
would astonish him

but this is not inspired art
or a performance

he is fighting for his wife

and the words—
(is this why poetry and love
smelt together
with such seamless heat?)—
his words

reach out to Alex
and hold her in a loving grip
way beyond any strength
Daniel thought he had

at the back of his mind
he tells himself
to remember this flood
to remember the generosity
of his angel

‘Daniel. darling.’

he stops
in the middle of the unswept floor
and tries to hear his wife
over the unangelic banging
of his heart

‘You don't have to put yourself
through this.
it's all over.
she's gone.
gone.
back to Hawaii'

Daniel's angel exits
like a terrible Elvis movie
in a gurgle of blue lagooning shirts
and daggy surfboards

‘Hawaii?’
he shakes his head
‘Hawaii?’

‘Remember?’
Alex gulps
‘biggest and best telescopes
in the world.
biggest and best look
at the universe'

‘Beats looking at you, eh?’

Daniel says with savagery

and knows his angel
has gone
and his own bitter sour self
is back
and swinging.

Worms

Be careful what you pray for.

Her head had been a can of worms
all year.

On some days she and Rachel
talked nothing but worms.

Giant tube worms stuffed like sausages
with bacteria.
Ice-happy worms burrowing into mounds
of methane.

She and Rachel had lived
like cheery *Alvinellid* worms
lapping up the heat of the vent kitchen.

Now the ground was opening up
under her feet
and there was nothing but worms.

Cancer worms multiplying through Daniel.
Huge heartache worms colonising her.

Extremophiles all.

They loved the heat. They adored
the cold.

She was disappearing.
Daniel was dying.
The worms were thriving.

Shellgrit

Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo
Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi
Daniel scrapes Catullus's rape threat
out from under his nails
and makes the threat his own

I will rape the both of you
as each of you deserves

*you in the arse, Phoebe,
you in the mouth, Alex*

would future slow-blooded critics
say of him
as they said of Catullus
that he doesn't mean it
a poem can only play?

oh little would they know
of poetry
oh little would they know
of him

The worm farm

It takes all Daniel's
courage
to open the lid
of the worm farm

but it would take even more
courage
to ask Alex.

The worm farm
is his job.

He would prefer a box
of red-eyed rats
to this seething face
of his own fate.

He reaches for the familiarly useless
comfort
of common sense

they're just worms
they're good for the garden

but reaching into the writhing dirt
is like putting his arm
down the mouth of a tiger shark
and feeling each row of teeth
grow.

The apricot tree

Daniel fights
the chemo nausea
smoking a joint
in the late five o'clock sun

he's getting better
at cutting Alex out
hunched over her computer
in a dark humid room

he slows his breathing
comfortably
as the good dope
kicks in
and notices the pearly half-moon
in the faded blue sky
hanging over the apricot tree.

With a quick delight
he sees the rough old tree
is starting to blossom
struggling a bit

with frail bits of stick
waving heavy white blossoms

Daniel rubs
his own heart hard

come on he prays
come on

The rainbow

We both shut our eyes
the last terrible time
we tried sex.

I felt his hurt,
perhaps hatred,
when I came on his fingers
not his struggling dick.

Were we *both* thinking
of Phoebe?

But over champagne
this lovely twilight,
with the roses
still drenched and scenting
heavy
from the late afternoon
storm,
we're open-eyed
as if all our drinks together
still count.

It's Daniel
who first sees the rainbow,
arching in the aery blue
beyond our garden.

'Look' he says
and takes my hand
loosely,
until the rainbow
fades out
with the squabbling cries
of the roosting lorikeets.

Seduction

It was the light
ravishing Daniel
like a seduction
he'd never known
like a fever
that had never ravaged him.

It was the light
tawny and strange
raging through the flickering
leaves of the apricot tree.

The light
the twilight light
coming for him
like a slow swelling sea
coming for him
a rippling salty eternity.

Beautiful little buggers

'Check out
these beautiful little buggers'
Rachel holds up to the light
grainy photos—

moons and worms,
slugs, balloons
and squiggles
of teeming bacteria.

I take them
wordlessly in

'Guess where I got them ...'

'Where?' my nose
floods with cold, spicy air

'Santa Claus has moved
to the South Pole, sweetheart'

'Lake Vostok?'

Rachel nods
grinning

'In an ice core'
I gnaw my cheek
'or from the water?'

Rachel leans forward

'We did it. Pay dirt.
From the water.'

'Contamination?
Rachel, remember the Mars meteorite.
Are you sure ...?'

Or is it me
smelling hot metal
hearing a dirty hum
as the secret
subterranean pristine lake
trembles?

Rachel,
completely out of character,
kisses my hand

'Say it,' she whispers
'say it after me—

Europa Europa
here we come!'

Selfish

My life is fucked.

Sweet merciless Time
be my deliverance.

Take my dying husband.
Take my absent lacerating lover.

Bring me the morning
when I'm heartened back
to my selfish self again.

The hard bright morning
that will bang my elbow
back to smarting
good work.

Purgatory

I'm getting too comfortable
picnicking with Dante
in the Inferno

like a porpoising sinner
flashing his arse
in the boiling pitch
I'm getting the hang
of the place

it's time
for the character-building
vicissitudes of Purgatory

where you are purified
by flame
and intense boredom

but unlike Hell
and just like marriage
it doesn't last forever.

Famous

He wakes up early
tasting brass in his mouth.

Is it a stale stray trumpet
from his wife's brass band?

She's on the radio.
She's on TV.

Does she never weary
of her yakkety yak celebrity?

Daniel slithers green-eyed
and monstrous
along the Purgatorial terraces
and gloats over Alex
suffering the hard slog
of pride's punishment.

Crushed under her penitential
stone

her nose rubbed in her own dirt
and ashes
she wouldn't see the stars
let alone be one.

Daniel takes a gulp
of warmish bedside water,
he's starting to really
hate her

and there's no penance
for hatred

only a hell, a foul taste,
of self.

Alex wakes up
quickly as always
then leaning on her long
brown arm
smiles deliciously
into his eyes

and his heart turns
over

*with my nasty mind
with my failing body
I Thee Worship.*

Beatrice

Will she be waiting for me
on the other side
of the bite of fire?

Unlike Dante
I'm easy about flames.

I have no memory
of the church's dogged mercy
bar as a kid
when a few fervent born-again
had a bash at my soul.

I have no memory
of scorching stakes
and the pious stink
of blackening flesh.

Instead I've shared
with Dante

the fanatical faith of Poetry,
and the faith in Love

with gleaming
even amused eyes
waiting on the other side
of my life shivering through
the wall of fire.

Will Love lovingly
take me to task too?
I would so relish
receiving the rough side
of her tongue.

I'll know, like Dante,
my exile is over.

Love

During my good moments
I want to hold Alex in my arms
and tell her everything will be
all right.

It's not that fabled peace
of the dying.
I don't feel a bit peaceful.
Nor generosity of spirit.
I've forgiven nothing.

It's love.

Love still scuttling about
in my heart
like a greedy crab, claws akimbo.

Love that's hanging on.

Love that doesn't hoard
its staling miseries and betrayals.
Love that walks out at dawn,

like an exhausted Pushkin
with pistol, pride and poetry
to fight for his beautiful stupid wife's honour.

Love, like Pushkin,
that gets shot horribly in the guts
and still takes forever to die.

Penance

Every morning
Alex embraced the ritual
of Daniel's coffee.

With fanatical gratitude
she carried its Cross
walked its Stations
taking her pilgrim's time
to make it divinely
perfect.

She carried it on a tray
garnished with chocolate biscuits
he was always too sick
to eat.

She'd perch on the end
of their bed
chattering to him
while he took his first
shaky sips.

'Is it OK, darling?'

she'd ask
as if wanting him
one morning
to show her some real mercy

and make her do it
all over again.

Struggle

The world's too precious—
my soul's knuckles
bone-white
from hanging on—

the sun on my chest.
the crimson toothbrush
first flowers on the grevillea
Alex and I chose together
never thinking—

what?

it's Spring
beautiful. jasmine scented.
floating around me
like—

what?

not a one-night stand chemise.
not one of her remote gorgeous
nursery nebulas—

what?

is it the purplish new leaves
on the lemon tree?

remembering it was
our lemon tree
our lemon tree

The Peace Rose

This morning I know
where my blessings lie—
in my garden.

Now I don't have to wait
for the yard-arm
I drink when I like—
and enjoy my smokes too.

Why is the flute of champagne
in my hand quivering?

I have stopped crying
over myself
and my life's unweeded waste.

Why is my hand quivering
while there is the just-opened
peace rose
opulently fragrant to steady me?

My eyes flood
with its succulent colour
like the pulp of a sweet peach.

Let me water the rose's roots
with my jittery gratitude
and a good splash of champagne.

On the stroke

It's just a stroke away
from midnight
on New Year's Eve
I insisted Alex go out
and leave me

in bed with Dante

and unlike the living poet
guided down the stinking
circles of Hell
tonight I don't think
I'm casting a shadow

have I died already?

Would I feel more
substantial
if I were in Hell?

Because tonight
I am not feeling
anything.

The clean soft sheets
the exquisite company
of great poetry
a glass of going-warm
champagne
the warm black
summer night air

there is a peaceful fragrance
somewhere

the new year waiting
fresh and untainted
just outside the window

and now
the shrieks an illegal bang
acrid smell of firecrackers

pop
arrives the new year
like a big relieved gulp.

I stroke a page of Dante
and wish it were his
palpable living poet's
face

because tonight
I'm not feeling anything.

My midnight house
I'm waiting for my midnight snake

in my midnight house

I'm waiting with an Etruscan smile
and a leper's rattle

I'm waiting like Cleopatra
quippy and finished

O asp! O black beautiful bite!

In my midnight house
morphine stays up with me
as we happily watch
my life's fanged movies
fizzling away.

Red giant

Was Daniel really dying
or was he instead
slowly unconsciously
slowly deliberately
shrivelling her?

Don't the dying shrink
and cool,
rather than growing bigger
and hotter
like a red giant sun
dying in a horrifying bloat
across its planets?

She couldn't pity him anymore,
he was a cosmic catastrophe
he was boiling away
all her seas.

Ride a Macbeth

This morning I'm leaking
rotten egg gas
and I can't bear Dante.

Because everything
even in the muck
of Hell
sounds too deliciously fun
in Italian.

Let me ride on a black blast
of hammer-hard English.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Let me ride Macbeth's beat
like a broomstick
while I screech along
to his idiot's foul tale.

Pain is murdering me.

But leaving me with the bit
and bite
of my own tongue's
bolting and unforgiving
poetry.

Help! Another Day!

Can I scream to you, Emily?
All in spinsterish white
straight as a finger
at the end of my bed.

Blazing white—
oh Emily
your poems were never
so bloody obvious.

White-out.
Emily, I'm abusing you
like a morphine drip

my veins are hugging you
with a purely selfish
squeezing need

the letting go

Emily, is that my wife
in tears again?

The Martian Meteorite

Alex needed the drink.

Her fingers gratefully chill
on the clammy surface
of the pub glass.

The wine tastes sour
burning through her chest
but she gulps it down
like a beer.

And Daniel

unshaved, sweating and twitching
in his morphine doze
begins to dim
in her aching head.

Rachel is drunk and gabbling,
but her yak has a confessional
claw
and yanks Alex in.

‘Alex, I’ve always been
a gutless wonder.

I sat shtum
when they threw out
the meteorite.

I was shit-scared.
I can’t tell you
how many reputations
have smashed
on that fucking rock.

But I know bugs
when I see them.

You know me.
I live and dream
bacteria.

Christ knows about Europa.
But I’m telling you, Alex,
Mars is alive.’

The life zone

Driving home in the exhausting
becalmed
of the last few weeks
Alex’s mind crawls
into Rachel’s meteorite,
looking among
the trapped Martian gases
and controversial
microscopic scribbles
not so much for signatures
of extinct alien life
but for living refuge and comfort.

There was nothing more
to be done for Daniel.

It was impossible to know
if he was at peace with her
or himself.

He was now in his dying
even more mysterious
than the Martian meteorite.

And when he finally moved out
of the life zone
what frustrating silent fossils
would he permanently embed
in Alex's heart?

Dante's stars

Outside the sky darkens
and a silent wind is rippling
through the silver leaves
of a massive old gum tree

some sleepy last sense
drifting through Daniel,
like a last guest finding his own way
out,
wonders at the warm something
clutching his relaxed hand

but he's mostly
fully occupied.

This is the highest climb
he has ever done.

Who would have thought
he would feel so light

or is it still Virgil
doing all the work?

He must make it up to him
later
when they get to the top.

For now
there's this bottleneck
this last squeeze

Alex, his hand
breathes its last

suddenly he knows
just before knowing and seeing

fuse

he's climbed up
by climbing down

*and once more saw
the stars*

The company of breathing men

What of Daniel
now he has left
the company of breathing men?

He's tossing
quite pleasantly
on a water whirl of memory
like a jellyfish enjoying
a boisterous high tide

and he remembers distantly
promising Alex
that he would lovingly
haunt her
if he ever died first.

But he doesn't
and he won't.

He is being tossed
and taken
somewhere beyond
the gritty shores
of married love

then something stings through him
with an unearthly thrill

every angel is terrifying

beyond the tug
of a hoarse grief
dawdling fainter and fainter
behind him
he is changing
into a hungry fish
rapidly gilled
to dart and glitter
towards the exciting ether
beyond the stars.

Nudo come un verme

They brought Giordano Bruno
to the Campo de' Fiori
nudo come un verme

tongue spiked
he couldn't ensnare
the roaring Roman crowd
with a last whirling word
of heresy

tongue spiked
he could still
dismiss the cross
and look ostentatiously
skywards
straight into the morning sun

in a blaze of orange flame
and flesh-pungent smoke
his dying
is crackling eloquently
in Alex's shivering sleep

as she lies sprawled
on her belly
nudo come un verme

she wakes up
biting her tongue
in a sweat of pain
and panic

Bruno she mumbles
thickly to the dark
help me help me

Daniel's legacy

Why was Daniel's mother
lingering
in the post-wake mess
of half-empty bottles
and half-bitten crudités?

Was it that famed bloody
Irish blood
that can't leave a party?

Gulping down
a huge impatient fatigue
Alex approaches her
with as tender a daughter-in-law

smile
as she can dredge.

‘Sheila’ she says softly

touching the older woman
awkwardly
on her fat mottled arm.

‘What was he all about?’
Daniel's mother mutters
‘Just *what* was he all about?’

And Alex slumps
under the memory
of all the phone calls,
all the drives
to the outer suburbs,
all the loving tedium
of family outgrown,
Daniel had so cunningly
dodged.

‘I'll show you’
she finally answers
guiding Daniel's mother
into his musty study.

‘This’
Alex points
at Daniel's high-rise blocks
of lonely poetry

tottering over them
‘this
is what he was about.’

Daniel's mother nods
her untidy grey head

then quietly curses
‘I know
‘cause he bloody well
got it from me.’

Antarctic heartbreak
Two weeks after Daniel died
Rachel rings,
her raucous anguish
wrapping around Alex's face
like ether

‘We've killed Lake Vostok!’

Rachel's repulsive sobbing
is making Alex gag

and she doesn't want to hear
any more,
doesn't want to feel the cracking
death
of the nurturing ice,
doesn't want to see the oily murk
of the violated water.

‘Thirty million years’ worth
of new bugs.

all gone.'
Rachel howls down the phone

‘We're not scientists any more, Alex,
we're thieves
the kind that smash down your door
and leave their shit on your walls.

Rape
is too sweet a word
for what that hydrobot did.

It burnt and shat its way
through the ice,
and the only images
it showed us
were of its self
dying in a convulsion
of leaking fuel

killing the lake with it'

Under ice

Is this how Lake Vostok
used to feel?

Like me?
Suspended in frigid blackness.

It's not so flash
living under ice.

Maybe we did her
a favour.

Change is always
a bit mucky.

Maybe Lake Vostok was longing
for our hot drill.

Longing for the excitement
of contamination.

Maybe that's how life
moves forward.

Something dies.
Something much
more remarkable

comes into grubby bloody
being.

Extinction

Waking up in icy sheets
Alex feels an arctic tentacle
suck hard and cruel
on her aching leg

where was Marlowe?

was he still curled up grieving
in Daniel's old black
jumper?

where. where was Daniel?

and the long cold tongue
of extinction
licks Alex's ear

he's with me in the Martian sea

Honeyeaters (2)

The sky is darkening.
The computer screen glows
heartlessly
in the dim of Alex's study.

She looks out the window.
The garden is parched,
the grevillea waves thirstily
at her.

She keeps forgetting to water.

rain for christ's sake rain

but she's living through a taunting
drought
where the sky keeps darkening
without relenting into rain.

She leaves her work,
which is reeking
of stale nagging failure,

and wanders with Marlowe
out to the apricot tree,
longing for a spitting
on her face
and a rumbling give in the air

instead she hears the return
of the darting tiny honeyeaters
come out chittering
to relish
the chilly dry stillness.

Thunderstorm on Jupiter

It's drizzling outside.
Yesterday's heat wave
gone.

Alex watches the rain collecting
like a fur of dew
on the thinly tapering leaves
of Daniel's grevillea,
then notices
some of its leaves
are raggedly munched.

What would Daniel do?

She nibbles
at her useless numbness
and turning her back to the window
conjoins herself
flying through a thunderhead
on violently alive Jupiter.

How big a lightning bolt
would it take
to crack her ice?

Crack her wide open
to the risk and thrill
of living again.

Questions from the floor

Insomnia loves meetings.

Insomnia likes them best
with endless belligerent questions
from the floor.

Daniel, why can't we laugh off
these deranged ratbags
like we always did?

Even Europa has joined the mob,
too proud and distant
to use the mike,
asks me whispering
*what do you really know
about me?*

Daniel, don't leave me
it gets worse.

Lake Vostok slops to its feet
and doesn't have to ask anything

but hold up grime-slicked
empty hands
and point the finger

Your parrots

Can the colour of grass
overwhelm you like music?

Hold you taut and tearful
like a violin stringing you
up?

But something's moving in it
like a nest of rats.

A flock of parrots.

Oh Daniel red-rumped parrots!

Bugger them.
They're in sticky pairs.

Don't hold the domesticity

of parrots
against me
now you're dead.

But please
keep thumping in my head
rip through my brain blood barrier
if you must

infect me give me
your songs. Your parrots.

You once asked me
Daniel, you once asked me—
belligerently—
if I'd loved Phoebe
 as much as I'd loved you
'at the beginning'

beginning
oh christ, darling,
I remember how your voice
broke
on the wheel
of that word.

Daniel, my Daniel,
can I talk honestly
to you now?

Your ghost
a far better listener
than you ever were—

though I do miss
your snorting acerbic
interruptions.

I never loved Phoebe
as I loved you.

Not at the beginning.

Not at
the end.

Like Europa she was a mystery
I wanted to conquer
and crack.

And like Europa

she had the last numbing
word.

But you, darling,
were no ice-crust-ed
speck
teasing me
from a cold night sky.

You were always
ardently present.

You loved me more
than I ever loved Phoebe
or Europa.

You were the champagne
glass
desperate to be heard—

right there singing
in my careless hand.

The only lemon

Daniel had adored the lemon
tree,
clucking over its one and only
lemon

‘it's getting bigger’

he would say

‘look, I can see
a bit of yellow,
give it a week
and we'll celebrate its ripening
in a gin and tonic’

they never did

Daniel died,
and the lemon
was still green,
and growing
infinitesimally slowly

some late afternoons
Alex would wander out
with Marlowe
on a lemon walk

she suspected
that the lemon
would still be there
green and growing
after she herself
had died

the lemon had a kind
of perverse defiance,
refusing to grow up,
refusing to be plucked
sliced and floated
in someone's moment
of sweet alcoholic
clink and epiphany

it was an infuriating lemon,
but it seemed to hold
some secret

to time dilation,
and Alex, on strange silent
afternoons
after Daniel's death,
almost believed
that the lemon
was slowing her own life down,
her own fatal ripening.

Early morning terrestrial

Admit it.

There's no birdsong on Europa.

When the tiny sun rises
over the blinding bergs and cliffs
there is a silence
so loud
it would stone your heart.

This morning,
behind the lace-work
of foggy gum trees,
a currawong is calling
Alex awake
calling
like a sun-pinging creek.

Giant squid

I dreamt last night
that I lay naked

at the bottom
of a soft black sea
in the many loving arms
of a giant squid

our strange
mutually enraptured
breathing
in perfect unison
as we nibbled on
each other's precious
alien faces.

At the back of my purring mind
was an itch for a camera,
to show the world
my lover, my monster mollusc,
truly existed.

But in my dream
I didn't move.

There was a terrific tranquillity
in just lying still
and not proving anything.

Numbers

I get magic
(sometimes I get more
than I bargain for)

but I don't get
numbers.

Numbers do worse
than humiliate
or elude me

they don't add up.

I am no algebra tart
ravished
by the meretricious music
of the spheres.

The labyrinth of intimacy

'Beyond the strength of any other act of witness, literature and the arts tell of the obstinacies of the impenetrable, of the absolutely alien which we come up against in the labyrinth of intimacy. They tell of the Minotaur at the heart of love, of kinship, of utmost confiding.'

George Steiner

How far did the Minoan thread go
in the labyrinth of intimacy?

Was there less tear and tangle
when they loved their dead
more than each other?

The world of gorgeous hallucination
is a sweeter place to visit
than the mucky lair of another's heart.

The Minotaur helpless
the Minotaur bleating blind
in the brutal sun

is this the truth of love
none of us could bear?

Charles Baudelaire's Grave

How do you bury a poet?

Surely not
how they buried Baudelaire
thrown in with his parents
like an infant death.

It stretches
to a ghastly irony
Pasternak's remark
that poets should remain
children.

Do poets really want to trade
the lingering savour
of experience
for guileless eyes?

There's something
repulsive
about an empty fresh
adult face.

Such baby faces
can be seen in uniform
or with a foot
on a slaughtered tiger.

They can be capable
of anything
or a long lullaby
of nothing.

I want to exhume Baudelaire
and give him his own
magnificent mercurial vault.

From one angle
an arching ebony cat.
From another
sneering black marble
spleen.

No poet
dead or alive
should rot
with their parents.

What Death can do

'No more let Life divide what Death can join together.'
P. B. Shelley, 'Adonais'

What did Death do for the Minoans?

Did Death flash among them
like distraught lightning?

Winter is no sleep
when grief keeps you
on your burning toes

you dance the god's bones
to glass

you dance the god's bones
to a mirror

Who is it?

that long hair
dripping
like a stalactite
into your eyes?

You dance blind
for a dead face
being born again

you dance for yourself.

PETER ROSE

b. 1955

Peter Rose was born in Wangaratta, Victoria in 1955, and grew up there and in Melbourne. His father, Bob Rose, was a famous Australian Rules footballer who played with Collingwood Football Club, and several other members of the Rose family were footballers, including Peter's elder brother Robert. Peter Rose, more inclined towards a literary career than an athletic one, attended Monash University in the early 1970s and subsequently found work as a bookseller. In mid-1990 Rose became a publisher at the Melbourne branch of Oxford University Press, where he remained until taking up the post of editor of *Australian Book Review* in 2001.

Rose published his first poems in the literary journal *Scipsi* in 1985, and his first collection, *The House of Vitriol*, appeared in 1990. He has published three further collections of poetry, including a volume of new and selected poems, *Rattus Rattus* (2005). He has also written a novel, *A Case of Knives* (2005), and a memoir, *Rose Boys* (2001), joint-winner of the National Award for Biography in 2003. A highly visible figure on the Australian literary scene thanks particularly to his position as editor of *Australian Book Review*, Rose has served on the judging panels of major literary awards including the Miles Franklin Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, and has edited the selections *The Best Australian Poems 2007* and *The Best Australian Poems 2008*.

Morning Bias

for John Slade

Crab-like, immaculate,
millionth rollie in his mouth,
the septuagenarian dreams
on his buggy, pressing
ancient greenery before
advent of bowlers in white.
Velvet of ages in a reverie,
soft implicit morning.
Shadows on the green
inch like natural biases.
Flags go up: imperial.
Weekdays bring Apollos
in pinstripes and brogues,
but Saturday souls
are serious as hats.
A car door slams shut,
heralding the first quip.
Old men in white appear:
creased, defiant, stooped.
All week they have spun balls
in the mind, anticipating
the edging out of friends.
Old jokes are passed
like pikelets on a plate.
A new hip is welcomed
to the brotherhood of joints.
Glinting in the sun, a coin
pirouettes and disappoints.

Morning in Canberra

Perhaps, in the end, it defies naming,
escapes all conviction, this legerdemain,
the novelist's principle. Perhaps
it may only be characterized
in normative terms, visceral verbs,
wormed purtenances wrought by dawn,
what the empiricist had for breakfast.
Unshaved, phlegmatic, aphasic,
dazed by each sunless pronouncement,
he raves through an open window.
Morning here is a history of fog,
the season's first, a gnostic nods,
and skies of damask flecked
by birds. Beyond the statuary,
beyond the omnipresent good taste,
conjugates of eucalypt,
a raven's minatory swoop,
Hygiene City cowled in red.
That which we cannot frame,
that which belies all naming,
hovers round me during my stony vigil,
cold as the flame of aesthesis.
Patience, Inanition, Resignation:
these are the games we play
while the others put on their robes
and reputations, brilliant and brocade.
My several cups of coffee,
sophistries of cigarettes,
a chapter of Conrad subversive as light:
these all condite my namelessness,
overturing hope. Eventually
the sun will pierce the pendancy,
a subtile shower will clank to a halt
in a far room of this fictive house,
and we shall breakfast together in the sun,
silent, ravenous, from a single plate.

Morning at Kiama

for David Mackie

They have it to themselves this morning,
the dolphins, the gannets, the fishes,
the sea all changeless, temperate,
tilting slowly like a dreaming lover,
slow motion almost.
Sleek, cobalt, deep, unturbulent,
foamless infinitude without form,
the sea rides on musing on a theme,
whether to don its usual crown,
drown some innocent for breakfast.
(In the harbour
where dolphins shelter and are shot
the cortège slowly passes,
a wreath remembers the Italian fisherman,
dead since Tuesday.)
Overhead, demoralized by dawn
and panicky as pedigrees,
squat clouds rearrange themselves.
A skiff with red sails tacks
across the sun. On the cliff
lies a solitary, domed in exotica.
And the moon, perfect, ovular,
that cheered us last night
as we made our way home,
its journey almost done.

These Questions I Would Ask

Have you ever imagined me lying
in an empty hall or filling
kidney bowls for importunate nurses?
Was it you who found me in a
desolate car-park, telling
myself unholy dreams to fend
off shapes in Ferris wheels?
Ever peered through tinted glass
(the cavalier of grave advice)
or even once looked up to see
the single face in my demands?

Three Last Questions

Years later
are you wakened at midnight
by a telephone ringing
and ringing?
Do you stand there
naked and swimming
in a long hall,
dangling the cord,
disentangling her hair,
ears singing with a grievance?
Does a certain voice bid you
across that irrepressive gloom,
connection static, tone tremulous:
'On my desk you'll find it,
under the Last Poems
of someone or other,
so frank and incoherent"?

Darlinghurst Poem

In city squares everywhere
you meet them, witness ruin
on scabby brows. They are the seers,
grimy warlocks of our streets.
They copulate with shadows,
philosophize with fountains,
bed down in the wreck of comfort.
Even if you don't care to,
even if your conscience is crystal,
your morals wart-free, they will
haunt you and gnarl you and bruise,
damning as any brother in a dream.
Tonight's exemplar could be Mexican,
he may not. Prematurely ancient,
he lords the expressway
like a discredited grandee,
rocking his bundle of possessions,
his voice cracking with the pity of it.
'Jesus, this madness.
Everyone going backwards
and forwards. Madness.'
No blasphemy arrests
the insolence of cabbies,
the luridness of lavatories.
Inside his greasy pin-striped trousers,
several sizes too large,
a boy's thin shanks are twitching.

I Recognize My Brother in a Dream

for Robert Rose

Run to ground in a desecrated cemetery by
the Murray River, I am told that a power failure
has occurred in the town's electricity plant,
throwing the entire region into darkness,
an existential night in which the ubiquitous
love-maddened cicadas and the Jewel Hotel's
sun-wizened inhabitants fall silent for a moment
before droning intoxicatedly on. Immediately
I set off for the library where I work,
to help off-load books and reassure chiefs,
the computer no doubt having 'gone down',
thrown into a sort of crimson chaos. As I go,
rushing down broad avenues of sullen ochre,
avoiding the prams that flash across my path,
my feet send up hurricanes of dust and I glimpse
neurotic women clambering into fetid attics
laden with tawdry hat-boxes. Frightened
I tell myself I am not afraid and resolve
to creep quietly on. On the pavement
oily, parasitical insects insinuate themselves
in sandy rivulets like scorched flesh,
so that, near the town hall,
all gothic emanation and tarnished gargoyle,
I find myself longing, even praying for
the unspeakable rites of a carrion-bird.
Arrived in the main street I weep.
The library, imposingly situated between
the blood bank and the football oval,
is ablaze, everything in it presumably lost:
library staff, manic borrowers, the erudite.
Undismayed, teams of earnest young firemen
compete to douse what yet might prove
superior to flame, unleashing swollen hoses
and flicking them about like nightclub singers
with their microphone cords, so officiously
I no longer misgive. Further along
stands a two storey block of flats,
ugly, stuccoed, rented, utilitarian,
designed only to withstand the erosion
of a certain stoic architectural standard.
Upstairs three boys are leaning out of
a window festooned with purple ribbons,
jeering at something which I cannot make out.
The youngest is shorter and blonder than
I recall, his face vivid and suntanned

and smiling like that of an angel.
With uncanny attention to detail
and though I am many years his senior,
he describes the furnace for me:
how its flames torment the woodwork,
lifting great sheets of bubbling yellow paint,
and hordes of camera-laden spectators
cringe behind their cordoned safety.
Only then, as in a paradisiac dream,
do I recognize my young guide as my brother.

Ladybird

for my brother

One year ago almost to the hour
we got the news about our father
and it was downhill all the way,
six weeks of crisp mordacity.
No quarter-century lessening for him:
just a curt sentence and eclipse.

Yes, one year ago, almost to the hour.
Except you weren't there,
dead yourself these five years—
on your daughter's birthday.
You never understood my lexical craze
but I could spend eternity hunting for a
long beautiful word for addicts of anniversaries.
There must be a name for it, a need.

Five years. No time, but all time:
lustrum of encyclopedic loss.
You were twenty-two when it happened;
forty-seven at your death, younger than I am.
Why is it that only now do I feel
the full burden of its grotesquerie,
the callous moral heft of it—
not those bulky limbs we lifted
and straightened a thousand times,
but the early loss of you, the spasmic curse?

And still I go on reading:
for distraction or enlightenment.
Today I'm deep in Gosse's *Father and Son*,
so numb at the horrors of the Brethren
I put myself to sleep quite deliberately—
for thirteen minutes, my watch tells me
when I stir. Well, my father's watch.
Our mother slipped it off his wrist as he lay dying
and handed it to me, consolation in time.
'Not that it's worth much,' she said,
reminiscing about the notorious clip
that always failed him at critical moments.
Collingwood veterans still laugh about it,
how it was always coming undone
during halftime speeches. They'd wait
for Dad to punch his fist for emphasis.
Now it brings me undone too,
during meetings or writing this poem.

Often it dangles down or pinches me,
like a warning, a reminder.

Suddenly I'm dreaming on my bed.
It is a cursory dream, a digest from the dark,
sharp as the flick that wrenched your neck,
your birthright, your physicality.

Thirteen minutes. It feels longer—
curdling a long life into an hour.
That's how long our tennis matches took.
We'd set off on Sunday afternoons,
always fretting about the weather.
You weren't playing, of course.
Patient in your wheelchair, you'd umpire
by the net, laughing at our squabbles,
our limp trademark backhands.

Today, though, in my dream,
it's you I'm competing against—
though the court resembles my bedroom
with its monographs and cityscape.
The game is tense and visceral.
Neither of us bothers to remark
that you're nimble again, competitive.

Tense as compasses we hunt down balls
and eye each line like jealous colonizers.
When your deft backhand hits a corner
I'm about to call it out until I notice
a damp mark on the en tout cas—rather,
my pallid carpet, which shows every stain.
With queasy sportsmanship I call it in
and we play on. I lose the point.
Next game, I watch my nervous backhand
miss by an inch and am surprised when
you hunt it down. But your cross-court shot
misses by feet and seconds later you call 'Out'—
meaning mine. 'A bit late!' I pout,
trudging back and sinking into clay
which oozes now and swallows me,
this high bedroom become a mire.
So the tubercular diva splutters on her deathbed,
impatient for a word. E tardi.
I await your response but wake too soon.
The contest is over, always unfinished.
I cannot will it back, resume the game.
Too late, indeed. We leave it much too late.

Yet when I take up my Gosse—
one anniversary over, another to come—

what do I find but a ladybird
creeping over the yellowing Penguin
and settling on my father's watch.
I haven't seen one since Wangaratta.
Straight as an arrow it takes me back
to the bridge we played beneath as boys,
dumping our bikes by the road.
Teasing each other, we'd compete
to find the most ladybirds,
rapt, jostling each other, ecstatic.

The Living Archive

for my mother

Unwrapping a pair of luxurious towels—
one so dark as to be almost black,
the salesman quipped, stroking it
and his permanent wave, marvelling
at my tangible cash, the other
vaguely ruby for an anniversary—
unfolding these and holding up the
marked-down clock bought that morning
in a jeweller's shop half sealed-off,
as if pearl and choker no longer paid,
you answered our facetious question
rather earnestly, which was unexpected,
saying you couldn't recollect unmarried life,
the twenty-odd years romanticized by a
fantastical son: waitress, stenographer,
the stoic girl outbraving rheumatic fever
(not once complaining, an uncle said),
one of Mario's dark-haired croonettes,
advised to concentrate on opera by a
visiting Italian tenor, but already
contracted to a bantamweight from the bush.
I have files on you, and fingerprints,
and photographs, yet the shards of memory
disintegrate under our feet—
leave me sentimental and otiose,
Antonia's archivist in the Offenbach,
the last romantic to convert to disk.
By then it was time for a toast,
my father and brother with their sudsy beer,
the two of us sipping nostalgic sherry,
as if the decades hadn't materialized
and a different dog wriggled on the rug.
Later, at the restaurant, for entrée
you served up familial anecdotage
(not your traditional fare): tales of
Robert's lethal cocktail, tripping
over snakes in the Warby Ranges,
our first morning in Auckland
when a bus missed my by that much.
If I knew this I had forgotten.
And what to do with a two year old's
first foreign foolhardiness,
often re-enacted on conscious kerbs?
Then the joke was on the guests,
all our respective anniversaries.

Around the table we went in a divorcing wave,
none outlustring the unimaginable ruby.
Like Donne's computing lovers
I stall at the first, and vainly project.
Chuckling at his end of the table,
the best my brother could do was three,
which we christened the Tinfoil Anniversary.

Anniversary

From The Catullan Rag

There's no truth in those rumours, Lesbia.
Nothing's changed. Though we haven't seen
each other in years I'm with you still,
unestranged. I have my spies,
those five wrung senses you liked to craze.
Tonight, maudlin from pungent wine,
the kid done just how you like it,
I'm back there again, back at the beginning—
that louche, subterranean bar you led me to
down one of your warped lanes. Oh yes,
they remembered you behind the bar,
stood there whispering what they'd
like to do to you.

But what drew us
into town all those years ago?
That book you said you must have,
the one you couldn't sleep without,
outré verses by your slim protégé.
Eventually, after much cursing,
we found a filthy copy in a corner.
Little did the virgin behind the counter
know what a fillip you sourced in literature.
We stayed in the bar all afternoon,
swapping lines, looks, though we were
expected in other places.

I'm back there now,
alone, intoxicated, memory
my willowy date, still dazed by the way
you looked at me then—look at me still.
Poised as ever you betray nothing,
just mild boredom at my dazzlement.
Idly you flirt with the barman from Cyprus,
strumming your fingers on his swollen wrist.
I move closer, part your hair, breathe with you—
your ardent tongue-tied worshipper.
Drowning, I have no idea what you're saying,
only how you say it: the sexy clutch
in your throat from all those Camels,
those eloquent hands spidering up
your arms, ensPELLing me.
God help us, were two people
ever closer in that choked bar?
When I leave tonight,

when I resume my singular fate,
I'll leave my book behind, leave it
deliberately, just as you did
(poetry as pretext or souvenir),
so that I can burst in, find you there,
faithless, ineffable, suffocating me.

Keith Jarrett: The Second Concert

Backstage,
slumped in amaze,
towel round your neck
like a heavyweight champ,
you are circled by jazz fiends,
pirate recordists and local arrivistes,
a blind prodigy led by the hand.
One cat farewells you saying,
'I'll see you in Japan.'
Another wants to know
what applause feels like,
as if it's a disease
reserved for the nimble.
Above the din I hear you ask,
'Man, when was the last time
you went deep sea diving?
The ocean is not the waves.
First there is silence,
then boredom, only then music.'

Operamanes

Yet they accuse us of being dilettantes!
A colleague interrupts my matutinal gloom
to announce that his father shared
a first-wicket partnership with mine
thirty-seven years ago during Country Week¹
He even recalls the sweep that got you out,
himself scoring a century
to your costive forty-three.
(History might like to reverse this.)
Another year, serving behind the bar
at the Collingwood Social Club,
I listened to a core of die-hards
extol your prodigious torpedo punt
in the 1953 Grand Final²,
the rare projectile artistry of it.
One went on to declare that
only a monumental shirtfront
stood between you and the '55 flag.
Anyone else would have sagged on a stretcher,
but not you—so the aria went.
Marvelling at my half-time rhapsodists
I mistook them for a coloratura's claqueurs,
devotees of Callas's³ phrasing in the
recitative leading up to 'Casta diva'⁴,
an erotic thrill in 'Ah fors'è lui'⁵.
We are all of us clamant in the gods,
avid, hyperventilating,
worshipping with stinging hands.

1. Country Week is a cricket competition.
2. Bob Rose (the poet's father) played in both the 1953 and 1955 grand finals, of which Collingwood won the former.
3. Maria Callas was the great soprano of the postwar era.
4. 'Casta diva' is an aria in Vincenzo Bellini's opera *Norma*
5. 'Ah fors'è lui' an aria in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*.

The Best of Fleetwood Mac

The gulf between a mute, elementary
kitchen and the more garrulous
maisonette is so mandatory,
so legalistic, as to entice only choirs
of staring cats and matted kittens,
broodily attuned to dementia of plumbing,
like wizards of the waiting-room.
Across this torpid lantern-jawed strip
down which randy beams tilt
when you least expect,
the Best of Fleetwood Mac
winds down on its crusted track,
convulses like an urban journey,
as if some grave, dilating guitarist,
the Seneca of Woodstock, digits
and features crippled in surprise,
reckons with the Parousia of Marketing.
Now only the uxorious pigeon's
captious insight rides the novel air,
affronting limb-locked plane trees;
and a transcendental Spitfire
bombarding our sluttish suburb
with sachets of pink detergent.
But this is another century,
another kind of phoney war,
the politicians' noses powdered
on one side like fruity overtures.
When at last I am free to begin,
when I plug these dubious imaginings,
I find I have no appetite for laundry
or maundering—not as free as I thought.
What shall I do with this thing, this life?
Where shall I bury it, dragging
a recusant spine over terminal ice?
In the bright mauve curtainless cell
opposite mine, confronting it even
like a glib date capable of one lisped taunt,
a precocious Jewish boy, on holidays
from California, lambasts his adoring aunts,
listing all their mortal deficiencies:
trite coffee, falsetto chat,
fond talk at midnight through a wall.
Now and then, exploding their shy defences
like the brilliant attorney he aspires
to be, he consults my herby sill,
sane jury of thyme and fennel and marjoram,
to watch them batten on his rhetoric.

A Succession of Suns

Anyway, that's roughly how it started,
the chronology a little stagnant,
beyond mere clockwork, mere speculation
about human nature, how it runs down
like sympathy in the stalls.
What's left is the inartistry of cameras
over your left shoulder,
temerities of tourists quelled
by the frogs' liliated anthem,
all the poets scheming in the chapel.
What is it this time but fiscal etiquette
and the comity of slums?
So you wait for the diffident man
to phone about his blue container,
the one with all the capped answers.
Hired to interrogate angels, oracles,
to capture an enigmatic voice
as it breaks, he is rapt conjecture
and the scars of a thousand conditions.
Meanwhile civilization happens
in its crypts and cafés,
oases of verse for which no one can supply
the appropriate half-rhyme. Giacometti [1]
could do something with this elongation,
you there sprawled on the rocks,
prodigal and carnified, lately
restored to your quondam element,
the palaeontologist's amorous fossil.
Sunburst now is a spasm of bathos
despite vigils of destitute morning,
the clumsy verses in the bay window.
Yesterday it hung there,
abstract, suspenseful,
like angular beauty surprised
in its everyday mirror.
I thought of all the regulated dazzle
waiting to happen without you,
the seasons of water lilies
and reveries of strawberries,
all the languid, memoried afternoons,
duettists making their way dumbly,
solicitously, through the historic garden.
All our constitutionals take us past
altitudes and platitudes where
something was ventured once in a
different posture, as if this world
of ceaseless intersecting traffic

is a ritual of inefficient angels,
the two of us intimate, opposite,
shored inside the same language.

[1] Alberto Giacometti. Swiss sculptor and painter.

Arguments of Rain

Slow arguments of rain.
A freshly killed possum
shivers among the woodchips.
Blossom hangs down, wet.
Going out, not sure why,
punctual joy succeeded by habit,
I pass a tenant from another flat—
the Cagney-like one who
scribbles ferocious messages,
addresses the world as 'you guys'
from beneath baseball caps.
She's standing in a courtyard,
never so rigid, so quiet.
I recognize her companion
despite the lowered head,
the rictus of sadness
that makes you look away.
Something is being imparted,
blunt as morning dialogues of rain.
My neighbour, born to the leather,
must tell the hirsute one
she is not wanted upstairs
and why she cannot be admitted.
Her tenure has expired,
the drizzle seems to say.
It is a banal message, never
well expressed, but often told.
Then grace notes of disbelief,
something terrible welling up,
some primal doubt or fear,
and the outcast is pulling her hair,
sick of it, impatient.
We have all heard the wailing
that will surely follow.
We have all been woken at night
and listened, complicit.
Returning with my newspaper,
forced to pass them again
and the witnessing possum, knowing
precisely which text they're using,
which lesson they're up to,
I scuttle past, climb the stairs
two, three at a time.
My high window overlooks
the horrible comedy. From above
it's like a slaughterhouse,
the possum saturated,

the rain settling in for Sunday,
the two of them hopeless, dejected.
How long before my neighbour,
remotely bored, calls a halt,
says she must go now?
Upstairs, aggressively naked,
we listen in silent sympathy
befitting our first night, first morning,
lips moving only in a kiss,
resisting slow arguments of rain.

Rainbow

Just because it happened yesterday
doesn't mean it's destined today.
This is not a current affairs programme
coily magicked free from blame—
the ludic news flash clipsing
slaughterous tangos of Molotovs.
More apt, oleaginous telethons with
no one on the switch, Warhol videos
showing necrophiliacs asleep.
Spare us your enskied blushes.
It's too late for talk of euphony.
Diapason this century never encouraged.
Now you remind me of a cricket commentator
oiling on about the rain,
two sessions to chrism before the
bulldog return of wire-jawed Lazarus.
I can just see you on the Day of Judgement,
politely outstaring a Revelation
then waiting to be allowed to go home.
When was the last time you stayed
for an encore, always measuring
pleasure against the primacy of sleep?
I'll stick with the German pornographer:
'We can sleep when we're dead.'
What about doing something really useful,
or truly awful? When was the last
time you welcomed irradiant pain,
an emotion worthy of a c.v.?
Try singing 'Di quella pira'
in the mirrors of parliament.
Compose a list of all the suicides
you have known, beginning with the letter K.

Number those bored boys on the waves;
try predicting their tribulations—
shark, Icarus, bankrupt, melanomas.
Beautiful sad girls with imperious olive skin
do the same on the shore evening after evening,
huddled in psychedelic panel vans,
shunned by misogynistic alsatians.
Narrate your dream if you must
but don't go on about being exceptional.
There is no place in a comedy for happiness.
Contemplate what it must be like
scaling a cliff, naming an ocean
in the belly of some enormous enterprise.

Strangle a sapling; vilify your mentors;
enunciate the Articles of the Sublime,
starting with yesterday's maverick
seaborne unrepeatable rainbow.

Three Poems in an Automobile

Seat Belt

In certain company
mine always dangled unfastened,
however erratic the driver
or sanguinary the prospect.
Death by their side
was not undignified.
Death was almost welcome,
the fastness dreamt of,
constance exquisite.
With anyone else though,
the martyrs, the divas,
the godlings, the rhetoricians,
it was the first thing I tightened.

Rear Vision

Climbing over me to memorialize
a hillock beloved of my childhood
(this before the crucifix had
been affixed, some needless quarry
struck for artless rock),
hoisting yourself, jostling me,
then arching in the back,
you revived our conversation
through the rear vision mirror.
Suspended, refract, your image
seemed momentarily grotesque,
all throaty, inverse eloquence.
Never had I seen you in a mirror,
never spied the asymmetric other,
gaunt, sharp, Latin, chiselled,
so unknown as to seem dangerous,
a stranger almost, unnerving me—
until I thought no more of quarry
or of cross, and, gazing,
mazed at my twofold luck, having
both your profiles for passengers.

Volkswagen

One night as we drove through
Malvern's dormant streets
the ashtray suddenly caught fire,
all the joints and Stuyvesants
swapped as we sped from party
to dawn, midnight to transaction,

got second wind, as if inspired
by weak puns and iconoclasms.
Smoke enveloped the bold bubble
like significance in a Noh play.
Getting out, we extinguished
them on a leafy nature strip,
stood silent for a moment,
depressed by our auto-da-fé,
your eyes lidless, vengeant as flame.

Graffiti

Catching our breath, patterned by unseasonableness,
we feel it simultaneously, the way indifference
envelops a restaurant like a peace conference,
fresh shows of bigotry in a literary grove.
They are with us, they shadow us, stepping
out of ourselves. My old stark repertoire
does things to your complexion.
Would you go back in time, in thought, in place?
How do you feel about a dig on an afternoon
resolute as this: sunshine, tangerines,
auguries of captivated night?
Not quite as unpredictable, don't you think?
We have all witnessed that thrashing,
evasions of dark. We have been up
those stairs so many times numeracy
invades our joints. Home, so private
we are nameless, we find them raising glasses
in a timeless toast. We draw the blinds,
prospect for inner worlds, we agitate for tremors.

To Adelaide

Dawn flights weave eccentric routes,
veering as the land balds,
holdings scarred and beautiful.
Sunlight dawdles on a dam,
ignites the midget fauna.
Apologizing for our tardiness
the pilot says we are bearers
of spare parts for a stricken jet.
‘What sort of an excuse is that?’
bawls my Texan neighbour.
Below, the land is quilted
like a chequered past,
cosmetic, infinitely private.
The in-flight service is delayed
and I am glad, but not the Americans.
Just as the captain predicts
a smooth flight we hit the turbulence.

Balnarring Beach

Summer, late afternoon breezes,
a green sail nervously aloft.
Siblings in pink togs
hurdlings waves, quashing them.
A moment's rivalry frantic
as tears, soon mollified.
Battles with wind-breaks,
a congratulatory calm
soon disappointing.
Unaccustomed nods to strangers,
a little astonished.
Too much seaweed, I guess,
but souvenired for mulch.
Ebullient games of cricket
in the sea, ranging
the whitest of cordons,
sly snicks into surf.
Beyond the point,
cool vistas in a hushed cove,
the lovers' eyeful colloquy.
Intermittent squalls,
elders sheltering in a cliff.
Pungent rocks luring
fascinated canines, philosophers.
The facing island, a mortal blue,
beckons, intensifies, vanishes.

Mildura, 2003

Through the Grand's frosted glass
two pigeons in silhouette,
their dislocating rites
tender theatre on a sill.

That coo will run through my weekend,
a cure for solity—
the insolence of being left,
noticing each weft in the tapestry.

I've come ahead.
Your plane is late, as if on time.
Sometimes the one himself
cannot avail.

Rain unwonted as crops
has locals gaping.
After the formalities
we all go down to the river in shifts.

Boxing Day

One by one
they drift back
to their apartments,
company cars laden
with feral gifts—
after-shave, a racquet,
vintage port
in balsa boxes
to decorate a tip.
Neatly knotted,
a stray tie dangles
from a visor. Night
flicks over like a
vinyl record, scratched.
Grilling steak,
bachelors whistle
in the only cool,
regretting stomachs
no longer flat.
Celebrations over,
they sprawl on beds
territorially,
new fans cooling
day-old resolutions:
sobriety, gymnastics,
the horn of independence.

Stuff of Sleep and Dreams

Looking up, the players have gone.
Punctual as death,
dogs sniff their way elsewhere.
A woman in a cosmic hat
strings a flag between saplings,
lies on her back – waiting.
For whom do we ever wait?
Not the team, yet the team returns.
What have they shared among the trees,
whom importuned?
A stray psychological sign
drifts across the field, omened.

MIDNIGHT OIL

Midnight Oil were more than just a rock & roll band. From the northern beaches of Sydney to the streets of Manhattan, they stopped traffic, inflamed passions, inspired fans, challenged the concepts of “business as usual” and broke new ground.

To see Midnight Oil in full flight was to experience the full visceral, transcendent, kinetic power of live rock & roll - the Oils could stand alongside any and all of the world's best. To experience Midnight Oil was to be inspired by ideas, to be encouraged to live life more passionately, to get involved in the world around you.

Everything about the band was uncompromising, but in the end their greatest achievement was that they were, night after night and album after album, a great rock & roll band. When you listen through Essential Oils the length and breadth of their recorded legacy is breathtaking and undeniable. What also confronts you is that for all of the incredible growth, ambition and experimentation that Midnight Oil evidenced in their time together, the sound and the fury and the spirit of their earliest recordings is still there 25 years later, on tracks like "White Skin Black Heart" and "Say Your Prayers".

The power and the passion...they always had it...and it oozes out of every pore of the 36 tracks included on Essential Oils.

Rob Hirst (drums, vocals), Andrew “Bear” James (bass) and Jim Moginie (guitars, keys & vocals) formed a band in 1972, which gradually evolved into Midnight Oil, acquiring singer Peter Garrett in 1975 and Martin Rotsey (guitar) the following year. Before they took it global, the band's early spiritual home was the Royal Antler Hotel, Narrabeen on Sydney's northern beaches and the lessons learned and reputation forged there stayed with them. It was there that the Oils fan base swelled from a handful to a thousand – in a room designed for half that number. On a typical night Rotsey and Moginie’s guitars flashed like twin layers of lightning across the rolling thunder of the rhythm section. Rob Hirst moved around his drum kit with a manic relentlessness, his kick drum always pushing things forward, setting the impatient, urgent tone. There was the anger of punk and the weird colourings of prog rock in Moginie’s mad professor lines and Beatlesque melodies. Out front was the massively tall, bald singer Peter Garrett who was a one-man furnace, radiating passion, wit and a bit of righteous indignation, always covered in sweat and dancing like a dervish with a cramp.

Between 1976 and 1980, Midnight Oil played out this blistering ritual up to 200 times a year around the pubs, clubs and ultimately theatres of Australia. At all of these shows the distance and the difference between the audience and band was almost indistinguishable. From their earliest days, Midnight Oil were writing songs about who and what they saw around them.

The eponymous debut album, smartly nicknamed "The Blue Meanie" (equal parts a reference to the Beatles and the snarl of the sound), was released in 1978 and was a collection of primal, spiky rock & roll. Like so many great debut albums it spoke directly about the milieu in which they were born (Sydney surf/suburbs culture) and was an in-studio approximation of their live set. The song “Run By Night” became an instant classic and despite receiving next to no commercial radio support, the album cracked the Australian Top 50. Midnight Oil was on its way.

A second album, *Head Injuries*, followed the next year featuring the singles "Cold Cold Change" and "Back on the Borderline" - the geography was a little

broader, the subject matter a little more universal and the sound a little closer to their live energy.

Shortly after Head Injuries Andrew "Bear" James retired and the bass was picked up by Peter "Giffo" Gifford. Recalibrating their sound as they would do many times, the band's new line-up released the 12" Bird Noises EP (featuring "No Time For Games" and the sublime surf instrumental "Wedding Cake Island"). Their ambitions growing, the band decamped to England to record the Place Without A Postcard album with legendary producer Glyn Johns (The Faces, The Who, The Rolling Stones). A dense, claustrophobic gem, Place Without A Postcard is arguably Midnight Oil's first great album - defiantly articulating a broader Australian world view on tracks like "Armistice Day", "Don't Wanna Be The One" and the epic "Lucky Country".

By the time Place Without A Postcard was released in 1981, the Australian pub rock scene was at its zenith. Suburban beer barns held 2,000 punters and the Oils were filling them nightly, creating rock & roll chaos. At the same time, the band was now well known for their support of environmental and social justice causes. Being an Oils fan wasn't a part-time or passive experience.

Released in 1982, Midnight Oil's next album 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 turned everything on its head. The band deconstructed their sound and then reassembled the elements into complex soundscapes that married acoustic instruments, electronics, feral electric guitars, drum machines, breaking glass and sharp sociopolitical commentary into a brilliant, multi-dimensional and completely unique album.

Recorded as the band lived on the breadline in London in the shadow of the nuclear arms race and produced by an enthusiastic, irreverent 21 year old Nick Launay, (PIL, Gang of 4), 10-1 is rock & roll paranoia at its finest. Drums play against drum machines while thick warm waves of acoustic guitar lay a bed for the immensely unsettling "US Forces" and the agitrock anti-apathy anthem "Power and the Passion". This was Midnight Oil saying they would not be boxed in by geography, precedent, corporate/government agenda or their own and anybody else's expectations.

The album was a monster success in Australia, staying in the Australians charts in excess of 200 weeks. It was also popular on US college radio and across pockets of Europe - as the band expanded its ambitions it also expanded its reach.

The next album, Red Sails in the Sunset, recorded in Japan, took the band's sonic experimentation and railing agenda to a new and extreme level. Loved by the band's existing fans, it was released in 1983 against the backdrop of singer Peter Garrett making a run for the Australian Senate on a Nuclear Disarmament platform. While Garrett's focus was on 'real' politics, Red Sails saw the band reveal a new set of colours with drummer Rob Hirst coming to the fore as lead vocalist on "When The Generals Talk" and "Kosciusko".

In 1985, Midnight Oil regrouped and reacted to the extremes of their two previous albums with the fierce, angry and streamlined EP Species Deceases. Released to mark the 40th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, Species Deceases reset Midnight Oil's bearings and included enduring favourites like "Hercules" and "Progress". It was a turning point, suggesting a new beginning.

That new beginning happened in 1986 when having recorded "The Dead Heart" for the handing back ceremony of Uluru (then Ayers Rock) to its traditional owners, Midnight Oil were invited to tour through some of the most remote communities in the Australian outback with the legendary Aboriginal group, the Warumpi Band. It became known as the 'Blackfella/Whitefella' tour and exposed

the band to the austere beauty of the desert landscape, the inspiring creativity of the indigenous people and the deplorable conditions under which the local indigenous people existed.

The Blackfella/Whitefella tour galvanised and profoundly moved Midnight Oil. They witnessed the great pride and resilience of the indigenous people and embraced their stories and the sounds of the desert into their music, learning to incorporate space ('The Great Quiet' as it was called) and to 'breathe the slower rhythms of the desert'.

The band returned to Sydney and with producer Warne Livesey began work on what was to be their global breakthrough Diesel and Dust. The singles lifted from the album, namely "The Dead Heart", "Put Down That Weapon", "Dreamworld" and their most successful single to date, "Beds Are Burning" opened-up Midnight Oil to new audiences all over the world. The band toured internationally through the remainder of 1987 and '88 driving the album to huge critical and commercial success.

They returned to Australia to record Blue Sky Mining with Warne Livesey again producing and with new bass player Bones Hillman bringing rich harmony vocals to the mix. Released in 1990, Blue Sky Mining was another critically-hailed and globally successful album and on tracks like "One Country," "Blue Sky Mine," and "Forgotten Years" the Oils brought a new international perspective to their songwriting while losing none of their passion, commitment or characteristic voice.

While on tour in the US, the band drew attention to the environmental disaster caused by the oil tanker Exxon Valdez which ran aground in Alaska spilling hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil into the pristine waters of Prince William Sound. They hired a flatbed truck and played a blistering set outside the Exxon offices in New York, stopping traffic and putting the issue on the front pages of newspapers around the world.

Midnight Oil's evolution continued with their next album, 1993's Earth and Sun and Moon. Their most introspective and personal collection of songs to date, the band further explored acoustic textures, replacing the unrelenting assault of their early records with a warmer, more seductive sound. Containing potent and pointed singles "My Country", "Truganini" and "In The Valley" it's an album that continues to reveal its strengths down through the years.

Earth and Sun and Moon was the band's entrée into the WOMAD world music scene and they eagerly soaked up new influences that were revealed on their 1996 album, Breathe. Recorded in Sydney and New Orleans with producer Malcolm Burn, the project produced the fan-favourite "Surf's Up Tonight".

Perhaps in response to the warm, dark textures of Earth and Sun and Moon and Breathe, Midnight Oil's next record was their most angry and confronting. In 1998 the world was in the grip of reactionary governments. In Australia, anti-migrant and anti-Aboriginal sentiment was being inflamed for political gain. Midnight Oil's response was the anti racist Redneck Wonderland, a post punk, industrial and radical album that pulled no punches.

In 2000 the band performed at the closing ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games with the word 'Sorry' emblazoned across their clothing - a reference to the apology due to stolen generations of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families between the 1890's and 1970's, in many cases never to see their parents again. They also recorded the excellent, grinding "Say Your Prayers", an anthem for the East Timorese which appeared on a benefit album and later became an addition to their 2002 album Capricornia. Taking on a new musical direction again and inspired by the themes of Xavier Herbert's book of the same title, this

was a swag of songs that addressed the history, geography and climes of Australia. Melodic and beguiling and distinguished by the crisp, chiming guitar warmth of Jim Moginie and Martin Rotsey on tracks like "Golden Age" and "Luritja Way", Capricornia ultimately became a proud way to conclude one of the most fierce and fascinating journeys in contemporary music history.

In December 2002 Midnight Oil officially disbanded when Peter Garrett announced his departure to pursue a future in politics. In the decade since their passing, the Oils have remained one of Australia's most loved cultural icons. Amongst a multitude of honours, both "Power and the Passion" and "Beds Are Burning" were listed by the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) in the Top 30 Best Australian songs of all time; the band has won 11 ARIA (Australian Recording Industry Association) Awards and been inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame; in the US, "Beds Are Burning" is included as one of 'The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's 500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll' and in 2010, Diesel and Dust ranked # 1 in the best-selling book The 100 Best Australian Albums.

Midnight Oil's music and legacy continues to resonate around the world. Their songs immediately conjure up the sights and sounds, the heat and the space of Australia. No band better exemplifies what it means to be an Australian – self reliant, no bullshit, resourceful and willing to risk it all; in love with the natural wonder of the surf and the desert and dedicated to the idea of a fair go for all.

MIDNIGHT OIL:

Rob Hirst – Drums + Vocals

Martin Rotsey – Guitar

Peter Garrett – Lead Vocals

Jim Moginie – Guitar, Keyboards + Vocals

Bones Hillman – Bass + Vocals

Andrew James – Bass (Founding member to 1980)

Peter Gifford – Bass + Vocals (1980 to 1986)

Truganini

There's a road train going nowhere,
Roads are cut, lines are down.
We'll be staying at the Roma bar
Till that monsoon passes on.

The backbone of this country's broken,
The land is cracked and the land is sore.
Farmers are hanging on by their fingertips,
We cursed and stumbled across that shore.

I hear much support for the monarchy,
I hear the Union Jack's to remain,
I see Namatjira in custody,
I see Truganini's in chains!

And the world won't stand still!

Blue collar work it don't get you nowhere,
You just go round and round in debt.
Somebody's got you on that treadmill, mate,
And I hope you're not beaten yet.

I hear much support for the monarchy,
I see the Union Jack in flames, let it burn,
I see Namatjira with dignity,
I see Truganini's in chains!

Beds are Burning

Out where the river broke,
The bloodwood and the desert oak,
Holden wrecks and boiling diesels
Steam in forty five degrees.

The time has come
To say fair's fair,
To pay the rent,
To pay our share.

The time has come,
A fact's a fact:
It belongs to them,
Let's give it back!

How can we dance when our earth is turning?
How do we sleep while our beds are burning?
Four wheels scare the cockatoos
From Kintore East to Yuendumu,
The western desert lives and breathes
In forty-five degrees.

In the Valley

My grandfather went down with the Montevideo,
The rising sun sent him floating to his rest,
And his wife fled south to Sydney seeking out safe harbour,
A north shore matron she became with some paying guests.

My father went down with the curse of big cities,
Traffic tolls and deadlines took him to his peace.
Now Bob Dyer glued us to our seats
And lawns were always victa neat
Whilst Menzies fawned at royal feet. Do you remember?

In the valley I walk. I took some comfort there.
In the valley I walk. Cold comfort I can hear you talk.
In the valley I walk - who will take me there?

When my mother went down it was a stiff arm from Hades,
Life surprises and tears you like the southerly.
She always welcomed the spring always welcomed the stranger,
I don't see too many around like this.
Oh no, that's what I'm looking for, yeah, what we're looking for!

In the valley I walk. Who will take me there?
In the valley I walk. Cold comfort I can hear you talk.
In the valley I walk. I took some comfort there.
In the valley I walk. Oh rough justice I hear you talk!
In the valley I walk to meet my water shed.

I hope virtue brings its own reward
And I hope the pen is mightier than any sword.
I hope the kids will take it slow,
I hope my country claims its own.

In the valley I walk. I cried, yes I cried. I was down then I crawled,
Mercy's arms all around me when I was down there.
In the valley I walk. Do you read me? They can hear me in the valley!

Earth and Sun and Moon

In the morning we will wake up and take to the air,
Look back at the planet - I'm glued to my chair.
Southern half is burning as we climb through the sky,
Sea-birds softly falling, smoke way up high.

There's the contours of the mountains, the deserts and the plains,
And a hurricane is blowing, and it turns once again.
Now there's oil spills in the water where Columbus once sailed
And there's history and mystery and it's rolling away.

I wish you could see this great mystery:
Earth and sun and moon, human tribe, thin blue line,
Earth and sun and moon will survive!

Sediment is plowing from river to sea.
Now where are the mighty nations? No lines to be seen!
An axe upon the broken ground, the sigh of the trees,
And it's floating in the ether, it brings me to my knees.

Too messed up to care,
Anyone got a wing and a prayer?

In the blink of an eye,
Thank you and good night.

Earth and sun and moon, human tribe, one thin blue line,
Earth and sun and moon will survive, will survive, we will survive!

PAUL KELLY

b. 1955

Paul Maurice Kelly (born 13 January 1955) is an Australian rock music singer-songwriter, guitarist, and harmonica player. He has performed solo, and has led numerous groups, including the Dots, the Coloured Girls, and the Messengers. He has worked with other artists and groups, including associated projects Professor Ratbaggy and Stardust Five. Kelly's music style has ranged from bluegrass to studio-oriented dub reggae, but his core output straddles folk, rock, and country. His lyrics capture the vastness of the culture and landscape of Australia by chronicling life about him for over 30 years. David Fricke from *Rolling Stone* calls Kelly "one of the finest songwriters I have ever heard, Australian or otherwise." Kelly has said, "Song writing is mysterious to me. I still feel like a total beginner. I don't feel like I have got it nailed yet".

After growing up in Adelaide, Kelly travelled around Australia before settling in Melbourne in 1976. He became involved in the pub rock scene and drug culture, and recorded two albums with Paul Kelly and the Dots. Kelly moved to Sydney by 1985, where he formed Paul Kelly and the Coloured Girls. The band was renamed Paul Kelly and the Messengers, initially only for international releases, to avoid possible racist interpretations. At the end of the 1980s, Kelly returned to Melbourne, and in 1991 he disbanded the Messengers. Kelly has been married and divorced twice; he has three children and resides in St Kilda, a suburb of Melbourne. Dan Kelly, his nephew, is a singer and guitarist in his own right. Dan performed with Kelly on *Ways and Means* and *Stolen Apples*.

In 2001 the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA) listed the Top 30 Australian songs of all time, including Kelly's "To Her Door", and "Treaty", written by Kelly and members of Yothu Yindi. Aside from "Treaty", Kelly has written or co-written several songs on Indigenous Australian social issues and historical events.

Paul Kelly has recorded nineteen studio albums as well as several film soundtracks (Lantana and the Cannes 2006 highlight, Jindabyne) and two live albums, in an influential career spanning more than thirty years. He was inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame in 1997.

Songs From The South, a selection of his popular songs first assembled in 1997 and expanded to a double album in 2008, contains many of his songs now lodged deep in the Australian psyche.

He continues to cross musical boundaries. The Triple J tribute album *Before Too Long*, released in 2010, featuring John Butler, Missy Higgins, Megan Washington, Paul Dempsey, Ozi Batla and many others is evidence of his influence on generations of musicians.

His first work of prose *How To Make Gravy*, a self described 'mongrel memoir', was published in 2010 with Penguin and is accompanied by a CD box set of live recordings and an audio book with readings from Paul and some of Australia's finest actors Cate Blanchett, Russell Crowe, Hugh Jackman, Judy Davis and Ben Mendelsohn.

In August 2012, Paul Kelly – *Stories Of Me*, a feature-length documentary premiered in Melbourne. Distributed by Madman Films, the documentary is an intimate portrait of the very private man behind the music. For the first time on

film, Kelly speaks candidly about the people who have helped shape his life and music. Featuring rare archival footage, Paul Kelly - *Stories Of Me* also unveils newly recorded live performances, as well as interviews with family members, former and current band members, music contemporaries and music media.

Thoughts in the Middle of a Career: Paul Kelly's "Songs from the South"

Robert Forster

It can seem futile trying to chase down biographical material on Paul Kelly because, just as he's ducked the glare of mainstream pop stardom, his self-effacement and unease with his past have left the songs to sketch the details, a situation he probably feels comfortable with. The bones of the story are: he is born into a large Adelaide family in 1955; his father dies when Kelly is 13; he begins playing the guitar at 18; and, after a short time studying Arts at Flinders University, he starts to drift. So he's born and raised outside the cultural axis of Sydney and Melbourne, cities he'll live in during his adult life; and he comes late to the guitar, something which doesn't necessarily affect musical potential. In 1974 he's in Hobart, where he makes his first public appearance, performing the traditional folk song 'Streets of Forbes' and Dylan's 'Girl from the North Country'. It can be safely assumed, therefore, that no photos exist of Paul Kelly in satin pants, stacked boots and a glitter top cranking out Deep Purple or Alice Cooper, as most 19-year-olds with a guitar in their hands were doing at the time. And, finally, no matter how battering the winds must have been to send him to Tasmania, the choice of these two songs on debut shows a remarkable prescience on Kelly's part, in light of his subsequent career.

The next chapter of the biography - and it is astounding that no official version exists - would take in the mid-to-late-'70s Melbourne pub scene, where Kelly finds rock 'n' roll and songwriting (wine, women *and* song, you'd imagine), and a large cast of musicians and characters who play his music and inspire his songs. Out of this comes Paul Kelly and The Dots, who make two records, *Talk* (1981) and *Manila* (1982), for Mushroom - albums that Kelly quickly disowns. He loses his record deal, his band, and times must have turned tough enough for him to leave Melbourne and head to Sydney, arriving by early 1985. That journey is chronicled in 'From St Kilda to Kings Cross', the opening track on *Songs from the South: Volumes 1 & 2*, a greatest-hits collection that pointedly has nothing on it recorded before Kelly turns 30. Behind him is a life lived on the rock 'n' roll margins; the price is sunken, watchful eyes and a gaunt face. Now come the great songs.

But first, let's meet the new band. On drums, there's Michael Barclay; bass, Jon Schofield; keyboards, Peter Bull; and on guitar, Steve Connolly. Over the next five years and five albums these musicians, known as The Coloured Girls and then The Messengers, are going to make a massive contribution to the music of Paul Kelly. Lead guitarists are easy to single out for praise, but Steve Connolly's playing is especially impressive, and the stellar stuff starts with three cuts from the breakthrough *Gossip* album (1986). The band will be robust companions to Kelly, taking the honesty and chops they learnt on the pub scene and dousing it with a '60s-influenced new-wave sound; in recording, it will grow bigger and shinier without losing its edge, a difficult task performed by the last member of the team, Alan Thorne. Kelly's luck holds - more likely, it is acumen - and Thorne produces

four of the next five Kelly albums. Thorne's live-in-the-studio approach works beautifully for the band, creating a sound that will not only influence future roots-rock bands but, through its directness, sparkle and dedication to the song, will also come to be seen as particularly Australian. Ultimately, it means the records these people made together are timeless.

Once a great songwriter hits a groove, the first ten years are probably going to be the most productive, if not the best. Volumes one and two of *Songs from the South* split at this divide, and while the years 1998 to 2008 are bountiful and well represented here, the character of Paul Kelly, the image of him that still lingers despite the passing years, stems from a fantastic run of pop and rock songs on the first volume, covering the period 1985 to 1997. That character - and it is unimportant how close it is to Kelly himself, although his lack of resemblance to the square-jawed lead singers of the day, from James Reyne through Mark Seymour, must have played a part - is appealing both for its comic value and its sharp-eyed take on modern inner-city romance. The Kelly of these gloriously crafted early songs is bemused ('Look So Fine, Feel So Low'), hungry for love ('Before Too Long'), foolish ('Dumb Things'), regretful ('Careless') and, on 'Darling it Hurts' - surely the best song ever about having a sex-worker girlfriend with a drug habit ("In one hand and out the other") - hurt.

Here's a verse from another song of this period, 'To Her Door', from *Under the Sun* (1987): "They got married early, never had no money / Then when he got laid off they really hit the skids / He started up his drinking, then they started fighting / He took it pretty badly, she took both the kids." There is an empathy here that doesn't seem forced, and an eye for detail that is surely one of the finest qualities of Kelly's writing. It's there again in one of his best-known images, a Silver Top bringing the protagonist swinging through the streets, back to his wife. 'To Her Door' has a happy ending; many of the banished men in Kelly's songs don't get a second chance, or have such an easy ride home. 'How to Make Gravy' is sung from jail, where a prisoner on the phone to a family member passes on his grief and his gravy recipe for a family Christmas he knows he can't attend. 'If I Could Start Today Again' is even more poignant: the comforting confinement of a family or relationship is suddenly burst by an unnamed "thing" the singer has done; he yearns to turn back time, to be taken back. And it isn't only in Kelly's imagined worlds that men get into trouble and have to plead their case. Taking Raymond Carver's short story 'So Much Water So Close to Home', he masterfully condenses the tale of men on a fishing trip who find the body of a murdered girl in a river and then fish on for two days, before bringing the corpse home to an appalled female narrator. Love songs aren't immune, either: in 'Winter Coat', the singer draws memories from an old coat bought with an ex-lover; he is alone, in exile, "freezing up in these cold, cold hills".

It wasn't only pop and rock songs that Paul Kelly offered on his first run of successful albums. 'Bradman' was a surprise: a seven-minute-plus take on The Don's career was not exactly typical material for a popular songwriter in the late '80s. But it was for Paul Kelly, who was brave enough to take on a story the size of Bradman's and attempt to bridge the gap between the traditional ballad and the rolling melodies of his own songwriting. It's a huge endeavour, like trying to squeeze World War II into an hour-and-a-half movie, and some of the writing is a little creaky ("And at the age of 19 he was playing for the state / From Adelaide to Brisbane the runs did not abate"). But the exit, when Kelly realises he is in fact writing a 20-minute song, is graceful: "So let the part tell the whole."

The other debt to repay is to Bob Dylan, who is central to Kelly's songwriting. 'Girl from the North Country' was a reasonable place for Kelly to start a lifelong infatuation with Dylan's work. The early songs of the '60s, with their soft-strummed chords and young man's yearning for social justice and love, are seductive, and a natural fit for Kelly and a thousand other singer-songwriters. On 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' (1991), written with Kev Carmody, the melody of Dylan's 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' is given an opening line reworked from 'The Times They Are a-Changin' - "Gather round people, let me tell you a story" - to recount the long fight of the Aboriginal stockman Vincent Lingiari for equal wages and land rights. 'From Little Things' is more successful than 'Bradman', neater and better crafted, and shows Kelly swiftly honing the skills of a fine balladeer and storyteller. Further lessons no doubt came from watching Dylan grow from the early protest songs, through the great '70s songs, to the late-period *Time Out of Mind* tales of lost love and passing time.

The break with the group comes in 1991, when The Messengers are disbanded and Kelly goes solo. In day-to-day life, this would mean upheavals and life changes for the musicians, Kelly included; on a greatest-hits compilation, it's just one track rolling into the next. But you can hear it: how the grit and muscle of 'Pouring Petrol on a Burning Man' (1990) gives way to the breezy and relaxed 'Love Never Runs on Time', from *Wanted Man* (1994), with the Bull sisters on backing vocals, and Peter Luscombe and Bill McDonald starting their long tenure on drums and bass. Kelly becomes a Melbourne recording artist, a move that allows him to pursue his career as rock performer and writer, while allowing him to dive into the musical subcultures that have festered in the city in unending cycles since the mid '70s. So, well into his forties, Kelly stretches out into collaborations, working with different groups and musicians to make the bluegrass- and country-influenced albums *Smoke* (1999) and *Foggy Highway* (2005); a self-titled, rootsy-groove record under the moniker Professor Ratbaggy (1999); and a brittle surf-spy guitar album recorded with his resident group under the name Stardust Five (2006).

Volume two, covering the decade from 1998, suggests it took Kelly some time to mould a band that would inspire and do justice to his rock and pop songs. There were false starts, with 'Love Is the Law' sounding cluttered and one or two other songs sounding too comfortable. The arrival of guitar players Dan Kelly (Paul's nephew) and Dan Luscombe seems to have bought a rush of blood. 'Won't You Come Around' and 'Gunnamatta', from *Ways & Means* (2004), leap out with force; the rhythm section of Luscombe and McDonald gallops to keep up, and a sound is forged. It continues on 'God Told Me To', from *Stolen Apples* (2007), and the previously unreleased 'Thoughts in the Middle of the Night'. This band has lasted three albums with Kelly, and you suspect he has finally found a group that can merit comparison to The Messengers. It is a different beast - more contemporary, more boom and reverb - but in essence it does the same thing: puts fire under the songwriter and makes his up-tempo songs sting.

The other highlight of volume two - and it strongly dictates the flavour of the second disc - is a loose group of songs that have nothing more in common with each other than that they tend to be more story-oriented. They're an odd bunch, and can lead you to believe that the further Kelly gets away from himself, and the more outrageous he is, the better he can be. But then, who wants to end up a comedy songwriter? Although he did have an album called *Comedy* (1991) ... In any case, 'Shane Warne' is great: "Each time he came in to bat or bowl / He believed in his

powers of total control / Even when he was not in the peak of condition." It's in a calypso style, with guitar, clarinet and congas. 'Every Fucking City' is the hilarious tale of a bickering couple and missed rendezvous set against the backdrop of Europe's capitals; besides being an exercise in split-second observation and delivery, it's a gentle nip at love songs and how relationships tend to end more in farce and anger than in tears. 'The Oldest Story in the Book' and 'They Thought I Was Asleep' are refinements of the Kelly book of narrative songwriting: gentle, melodic, packed with detail yet cut with economy. And 'If I Could Start Today Again' may just be the best thing he has ever written.

None of these songs would be as good or as pleasurable if Kelly wasn't the singer he is. It is - and you sense his often unenthusiastic self-appraisals are to blame - his most overlooked talent. His singing can be so in sync with a song's action and character that you forget to notice its quality. It rolls off his tongue; there are no growls or yelps, or strange ticks, or Americanisms, or faux-Pommy bits; he hasn't fallen into the horrible trap of so many old and new folk singers who sound like they've just stepped off the boat at Botany Bay, circa 1800. In fact, Kelly doesn't seem to be interested in authenticity at all - it just comes naturally to him, and it reaches further because of that, to the campfires and the bush, the suburbs and suburban pub, and the inner-city sophisticates. His voice - sly and warm, laconic and sometimes frail - may be the closest thing we have to a national one.

The first response of a musician on hearing Paul Kelly is often to head to the guitar or piano and work out how his songs go. They invite you to do that because they sound easy and approachable. Most of the tracks on *Songs from the South* are like that. Then you think: If the songs are so simple and the ideas behind them so clear, why aren't more people writing like Paul Kelly and sounding as good as he does? And the answer to that is: "They got married early, never had no money / Then when he got laid off they really hit the skids / He started up his drinking, then they started fighting ..."

From St Kilda to Kings Cross

From St Kilda to Kings Cross is thirteen hours on a bus.
I pressed my face against the glass and watched the white lines rushing past,
And all around me felt like all inside me,
And my body left me and my soul went running.

Have you ever seen Kings Cross when the rain is falling soft?
I came in on the evening bus, from Oxford Street I cut across,
And if the rain don't fall too hard everything shines just like a postcard,
Everything goes on just the same.
Fair-weather friends are the hungriest friends.
I keep my mouth well shut, I cross their open hands.

I want to see the sun go down from St Kilda Esplanade
Where the beach needs reconstruction, where the palm trees have it hard.
I'd give you all of Sydney harbour (all that land, all that water)
For that one sweet promenade.

Incident on South Dowling

My baby was dying,
Turning so blue,
Four feet from me dying,
My head was like glue.

I couldn't save my baby.
(He couldn't save his baby).

Loaded and sinking
To the vegetable zone,
She just kept on sinking
Now she's mineral and bone.

I couldn't save my baby.
(He couldn't save his baby).

We lived on the first floor,
We lived in two rooms,
Now my poor baby
She lives with the worms.

A head full of rocks
Is a heavy, heavy head.
I was watching a movie
Night of the Living Dead.
Now people they whisper,
Now people they stare,
They say I couldn't save her
Even though I was right there.

I couldn't save my baby.
(He couldn't save his baby).

We lived on the first floor,
We lived in two rooms,
Now my poor baby

She lives with the worms.

Look So Fine, Feel So Low

I've been seen on the street
Wearing brand new clothes.
I guess I've landed on my feet,
I'm lucky I suppose.
She tells me that she loves me,
She buys me things,
She wants to take care of me,
And all I gotta do is sing, sing, sing, sing!
Well I look so fine
But I feel so low.
Yeah I look so fine
But I feel so low.

She takes me by the arm,
She takes me all around,
She knows all her friends are talking
Saying look what our good girl's found.
One thing she's got on you,
She's so easy to impress.
When she asks me dumb questions
All I gotta do is say yes, yes, yes, yes!
Well I look so fine
But I feel so low.
Yeah I look so fine
But I feel so low.

White Train

Standing at my doorway,
I wondered why his hand was painted red.
'It's just a scratch,' he said.
Here we go again,
We stumbled to the car.
By the time we hit Prince Henry's he was white.
I said 'You look such a sight!'
He said 'I don't feel no pain!'

And I know just what to do,
And I know it's nothing new,
We've been through this before
And I must follow!
Why must it be you (on a white train)?

I stuck until the end
Though you said I was no friend,
But you were blind,
I was much too kind
On a white train.
Some will swill and some will sip,
Some just find a place where they don't slip,
Others take a kip
On a white train.

And I know just what to do,
And I know it's nothing new,
We've been through this before
And still I follow.
Why must it be you (on a white train)?

Luck

Well it hasn't changed yet
Each time I wake in a sweat,
And the sun has slipped out of the sky
As I get to my feet and struggle to dress.
All my fingers are thumbs, there's a fog in my brain,
Only one thing is clear - I'm late for my train.
And I know all at once that it's goodbye my one
I'll be here when you're gone.

Then I stumble outside
Try to flag down a ride
But the taxis just pass me by
So I run down the street, jump on a slow bus,
When I get to the station the train is still there,
I can't find my ticket, everybody just stares
And I'm turning to stone
As the train starts to groan.
I just can't get on.

I can see tomorrow,
Long, black train I follow.
When it's all there in your eyes
And it's all no big surprise,
Well, it's goodbye my one,
I'll be here when you're gone.
I just can't get on.

Yeah it's goodbye my one,
I'll be here when you're gone.
I just can't get on
'Cause I'm turning to stone
As the train starts to groan.
I just can't get on.

Blues for Skip

Babe, there's no water in the well,
Babe, there's no water in the well,
I got a funny feeling we're in for quite a spell.

Babe, I can't find a vein,
Babe, I can't find a vein,
I'm digging and I'm digging, I got the shaft again.

Little cloud, little cloud way up in the air,
Little cloud, little cloud way up in the air,
Well, I just ain't receiving, little cloud's moved on somewhere.

Babe, there's no water in the well,
Babe, there's no water in the well,
I'm digging and I'm digging ...

Adelaide

The wisteria on the back verandah is still blooming
And all the great aunts are either insane or dead.
Kensington Road runs straight for a while before turning.
We lived on the bend; it was there I was raised and fed.
Counting and running as I go
Down past the hedges all in a row
In Adelaide, Adelaide.

Dad's hands used to shake but I never knew he was dying.
I was thirteen, I never dreamed he could fall.
And all the great aunts were red in the eyes from crying.
I rang the bells, I never felt nothing at all.
All the king's horses, all the king's men,
Cannot bring him back again.

Find me a bar or a girl or guitar, now where do you go on a Saturday night?
I own this town, I spilled my wine at the bottom of the statue of Colonel Light,
And the streets are so wide, everybody's inside,
Sitting in the same chairs they were sitting in last year.
(This is my town!)

All the king's horses, all the king's men
Wouldn't drag me back again
To Adelaide, Adelaide, Adelaide, Adelaide.

Satisfy Your Woman

Brothers let me tell you
A thing or two I know:
If you don't treat your woman right
Out of the blue one day she's gonna go.

When there's food upon the table
And whisky on the shelf
And good loving strong
And good loving long
She don't ever need nobody else.

Satisfy your woman
So she listens for your coming,
Make her feel like someone,
Make her feel human.
When all is said and done it's up to you.

When you tell her that you love her
Make the words sound right.
Tell her whenever you're thinking of her
You always got an appetite.

And if you play around a little,
Just make her realise
You were just testing your mettle
And that's all a different kettle,
She's the sweetest fish you ever fried.

Satisfy your woman
So she listens for your coming,
Make her feel like someone,
Make her feel human.
When all is said and done it's up to you.

Little Decisions

Hard times are never over,
Trouble always comes.
Still I'm looking forward
To tomorrow when it comes.
I've done a little damage
To myself, I didn't care.
There are things a man can't manage
And that's the devil's share.

Little decisions are the kind I can make,
Big resolutions are so easy to break.
I don't want to hear about your big decisions.

Work a little harder,
Keep your mind on death,
Get your things in order,
Take a deeper breath.

If drinking is the problem
Then drink a little less.
If guilt becomes a burden
Find a friend, confess.

Little decisions are the kind I can make,
Big resolutions are so easy to break.
I don't want to hear about your big decisions.

Leaps and Bounds

I'm high on the hill looking over the bridge to the MCG,
And way up on high the clock on the silo says eleven degrees.
I remember, I remember.
I'm breathing today the month of May
All the burning leaves.
I'm not hearing a sound, my feet don't even touch the ground.
I remember, I remember.
I go leaps and bounds.

Down past the river
And across the playing fields the fields, all empty
Only for the burning leaves.
I remember, I remember.
I go leaps and bounds.
I remember everything.

Before the Old Man Died

I used to walk in shadows, I stayed out of the sun,
I used to sort information and I used to pass it on
Before the old man died,
Before we came alive,
Before the old man died.

I used to follow orders, did my duty like a son
But I fell in love with whispers and I turned them into songs
Before the old man died,
Before we came alive,
Before the old man died.

For the way he ruined our mother, not enough blood can run.
We had plans, me and my brother. Every day I cleaned my gun
Before the old man died,
Before we came alive,
Before the old man died.

Randwick Bells

Randwick bells are ringing,
Must be Saturday.
I woke late in the middle of the day,
Must be Saturday.
Put a blanket on the window
And come on back to bed.
We got nowhere to be and no place to go
So come on back to bed!

We're gonna rise up singing,
We're gonna rise up singing,
Randwick bells are ringing
Through the empty rooms.
The bells are ringing high and wide
For the bride and groom.

Put a blanket on the window
And come on back to bed
Just for a little while.
We got nowhere to be
No place to go at all, no,
So come on back to bed!
I'll make you smile!

We're gonna rise up singing,
We're gonna rise up singing,
Randwick bells are ringing,
Randwick bells are ringing.

Going about my Father's Business

Standing in the darkness watching while you sleep,
I can hear you softly breathing while I creep.
Going about my father's business
Doing my father's time,
What's done to me I'll do to mine.

I woke up one summer morning-he was gone,
Soft light through the window breaking for my son.
Going about my father's business
Doing my father's time,
What's done to me I'll do to mine.

Know them by what they do,
Let no one speak for you.
Just this I beg of you:
Forgive me, forgive me!

Someday when we sign the treaty I'll be home,
War is long and lasts forever and I'm your own.
Going about my father's business
Doing my father's time,
What's done to me I'll do to mine.
What's done to me I'll do to mine.

The Ballroom

I went down to the Ballroom,
She was dancing with her new fool.
She said 'Paul, this is Henry.'
Well I never know what to say when I meet 'em!

I was taken to a party,
I was accused of being deliberately downhearted.
She said 'Paul, why so gloomy?'
Well I never know what to say when I meet 'em!

Your wine tastes fine,
Your friends are talking to me.
I'd like to hide.
Guess I'm all tongue-tied.

Henry's gonna meet the family,
They're gonna have him over for roast lamb next Sunday.
Well good luck and I'm glad it's you,
'Cause I never know what to say when I meet 'em!

I was going home on Fitzroy,
She was walking with her new boy.
She said 'Paul, this is Tommy!'
Well I never know what to say when I meet 'em!

So Blue

Standing in a bright lit room,
Strangers all around me.
To the spot my feet were glued
Before the Lac d'Annecy.
I walked around then I came back
And stood there lost in wonder.
Nothing else there could attract
The rest were only pictures,
So blue, so blue, so blue.

I waited on a cold highway
Throwing stones and singing.
A man he took me all the way
Right through to Central Station.
'Where have you been?' he said to me.
I've been down to the gallery!
'What did you see?' he said to me.
I saw the Lac d'Annecy,
And it was so blue, so blue, so blue.

Now colour constructs every line
And the more every link is made fine
The stronger the net will be.

Every day he left his wife
To wrestle with his lover.
A hundred ways Mont St Victoire
And each time starting over.
Now Pablo's work was child's play
And Henri did it faster,
But the slow old grizzly bear
Was their only master.
So blue, so blue, so blue!

The Execution

The scouts report that you've been seen down the river.
They say you sleep with one eye open, one eye dreaming.
Did they tell you madness passes? Did they tell you
There's no such thing as passing madness?

The monstrous has become mundane,
Routine takes the place of pain.
Voici le temps des assassins.
You're addicted to revolution,
Addiction is no revolution.

Make sure your knife is sharp and clean,
Make sure you're not too late, not too soon.
Voici le temps des assassins,
Voici le temps des assassins,
Voici le temps des assassins.

Maralinga (Rainy Land)

This is a rainy land,
This is a rainy land.
No thunder in our sky,
No trees stretching high,
But this is a rainy land.

My name is Yami Lester,
I hear, I talk, I touch but I am blind.
My story comes from darkness,
Listen to my story now unwind.
This is a rainy land.

First we heard two big bangs.
We thought it was the Great Snake digging holes,
Then we saw the big cloud,
Then the big, black mist began to roll.
This is a rainy land.

A strangeness on our skin,
A soreness in our eyes like weeping fire,
A pox upon our skin,
A boulder on our backs all our lives.

This is a rainy land,
This is a rainy land,
No thunder in our sky,
No trees stretching high,
But this is a rainy land.

My name is Edie Millipuddie,
They captured me and roughly washed me down.
Then my child stopped kicking,
Then they took away my old man to town.
They said 'Do you speak English?'
He said 'I know that Jesus loves me I know,
Because the bible tells me so!'

This is a rainy land,
This is a rainy land,
No thunder in our sky,
No trees stretching high,
But this is a rainy land.

Stories of Me

Ever since you said goodbye
I've had a reputation.
I'm not drinking on the sly,
I'm the star attraction.
Every morning I wake up,
Fill my cup and listen bitterly
To stories of me.

They say a man is going round,
He looks a lot like me.
They say that man is going down,
It's looking pretty likely.
Every morning he wakes up,
Fills his cup and listens shamefully
To stories of me.

Everybody come on down,
Set 'em up and pass 'em round,
We're all here for a drowning.

I was down at Baker's Hall,
I heard somebody talking.
That's the last thing I recall
Then my mind went walking.
I woke up with a heavy head
On a hard bed trying to believe
These stories of me.

Yeah I woke up in a stranger's bed
Wondering about the things she said to me,
These stories of me.

Don't Harm the Messenger

One day you might hear someone knocking loudly at your door
And you know it must be bad news-absolutely sure.
You must realise before you strike the very first blow
He's the one who only tells you what you already know.

Lay not a finger on him,
Beat not, oh bruise not, his skinny skin skin!
No don't ever harm the messenger!

Understand he came a long way on a lonely road,
Multiplying were his trials, heavy was his load.
Understand his heart was breaking, never once did he sleep
And no hollow log kept him warm, no counsel did he keep.

Give him food, give him a bed,
Touch not one single hair on his head.
Don't ever harm the messenger!

Gossip

When I come home
All I want is revelation.
Meat off the bone,
What price is good information?
When I'm alone
I have too many companions.
Chewing the phone
All I get is slender pickings.
Gossip, gossip,
Give us this day our daily bread,
Give us this day our sweet daily bread.

It makes the world go round,
Over my shoulder I'm taking it down.
Fish gotta swim in the sea,
One thing for sure if you lie down with dogs
Then you get up with fleas.

Tender no thought,
Stick to the facts that invent us,
This is the court
And it's called common consensus.
Gossip, gossip,
Give us this day our daily bread.
Gossip, gossip,
It makes the world go round.

Dumb Things

Welcome, strangers, to the show,
I'm the one who should be lying low.
Saw the knives out, turned my back,
Heard the train coming, stayed out on the track.
In the middle, in the middle, in the middle of a dream,
I lost my shirt, I pawned my rings,
I've done all the dumb things.

Caught the fever, heard the tune,
Thought I loved her, hung my heart on the moon.
Started howling, made no sense,
Thought my friends would rush to my defence.
In the middle, in the middle, in the middle of a dream,
I lost my shirt, I pawned my rings,
I've done all the dumb things.
I threw my hat into the ring,
I've done all the dumb things.
I melted wax to fix my wings,
I've done all the dumb things.
I threw my hat into the ring,
I've done all the dumb things.
I thought that I just had to sing,
I've done all the dumb things.

To Her Door

They got married early, never had much money,
Then when he got laid off, they really hit the skids.
He started up his drinking, then they started fighting,
He took it pretty badly, she took both the kids!
She said: "I'm not standing by, to watch you slowly die,
So watch me walking, out the door!"
She said, "Shove it, Jack, I'm walking out the fucking door!"

She went to her brother's, got a little bar work,
He went to the Buttery, stayed about a year.
Then he wrote a letter, said I want to see you,
She thought he sounded better, she sent him up the fare.
He was riding through the cane in the pouring rain,
On Olympic to her door.

He came in on a Sunday, every muscle aching,
Walking in slow motion like he'd just been hit.
Did they have a future? Would he know his children?
Could he make a picture and get them all to fit?
He was shaking in his seat riding through the streets,
In a silvertop to her door.

Under the Sun

I went out one morning, I stood on the shoreline again.
Maybe I was dreaming as the light came streaming in.
Memory and rhyme bringing back the time,
Everything under the sun.

Leaving South Fremantle in a Falcon panel van,
We were smoking Marlboro, always singing Barbara Ann,
Spinning out our dreams, making up our schemes
All day long under the sun.

I can see them all so clearly now they're gone,
They're flying, they're dying one by one.

We were microscopic, swarming in the honey sun,
We thought we were endless, couldn't see our friendship undone.
Colourful and strange, a kind of life endangered,
On the turn under the sun.

Bicentennial

A ship is sailing into harbour,
A party's waiting on the shore,
And they're running up the flag now
And they want us all to cheer.

Charlie's head nearly reaches the ceiling
But his feet don't touch the floor,
From a prison issue blanket his body's swinging
He won't dance any more.

Take me away from your dance floor,
Leave me out of your parade,
I have not the heart for dancing,
For dancing on his grave.

Hunted man out on the Barcoo,
Broken man on Moreton Bay,
Hunted man across Van Diemen's,
Hunted man all swept away.

Take me away from your dance floor,
Leave me out of your parade,
I have not the heart for dancing,
For dancing on his grave.

Bradman

Sydney, 1926, this is the story of a man,
Just a kid in from the sticks, just a kid with a plan.
St George took a gamble, played him in first grade.
Pretty soon that young man showed them how to flash the blade
And at the age of nineteen he was playing for the State.
From Adelaide to Brisbane the runs did not abate.
He hit 'em hard, he hit 'em straight,
He was more than just a batsman,
He was something like a tide,
He was more than just one man, he could take on any side.
They always came for Bradman 'cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand.

A team came out from England,
Wally Hammond wore his felt hat like a chief.
All through the summer of '28, '29, they gave the greencaps no relief.
Some reputations came to grief.
They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn
And in the hour of greatest slaughter the great avenger is being born,
But who then could have seen the shape of things to come?
In Bradman's first test he went for eighteen and for one.
They dropped him like a gun!
Now big Maurice Tate was the trickiest of them all,
And a man with a wisecracking habit,
But there's one crack that won't stop ringing in his ears:
'Hey Whitey, that's my rabbit!'
Bradman never forgot it!

He was more than just a batsman,
He was something like a tide,
More than just one man, he was a match for any side.
Fathers took their sons' cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand.

England 1930 and the seed burst into flower,
All of Jackson's grace failed him, it was Bradman was the power.
He murdered them in Yorkshire, he danced for them in Kent,
He laughed at them in Leicestershire; Leeds was an event!
Three hundred runs he took and rewrote all the books,
That really knocked those gents!
The critics could not comprehend this nonchalant phenomena.
'Why this man is a machine,' they said. 'Even his friends say he isn't human!'
Even friends have to cut something.

He was more than just a batsman He was something like a tide,
More than just one man, he was half the side.
Fathers took their sons' cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand.

Summer 1932 and Captain Douglas had a plan.
When Larwood bowled to Bradman it was more than man to man,
And staid Adelaide nearly boiled over as rage ruled over sense,
When Oldfield hit the ground, they nearly jumped the fence!
Now Bill Woodfull was as fine a man as ever went to wicket
And the bruises on his body that day showed that he could stick it,
But to this day he's still quoted and only he could wear it,
'There are two sides out there today and only one of them's playing cricket!'

He was longer than a memory, bigger than a town,
His feet they used to sparkle and he always kept them on the ground.
Fathers took their sons who never lost the sound of the roar of the grandstand,

Now shadows grow longer and there's so much more yet to be told,
But we're not getting any younger, so let the part tell the whole.
Now the players all wear colours, the circus is in town,
I no longer can go down there, down to that sacred ground.

He was more than just a batsman,
He was something like a tide,
More than just one man, he was half the bloody side!
They always came for Bradman 'cause fortune used to hide in the palm of his
hand.

Shane Warne

Shane Warne – well known to history,
Shane Warne – bowler of mystery.
Whenever he walked up to the wicket
A change came over the game of cricket...
He had the leg spin, flipper and googly.

He came on the scene in 1992,
Those Indian batsmen showed him a thing or two.
“This fellow,” some said, “he don’t stand a chance!”
But soon he began to make the ball dance.
In Sri Lanka he first showed his colours true.

Manchester, England in 1993,
He bowled what they call the ball of the century.
Mike Gatting looked up, struck as dumb as a post
And walked from the crease like he’d just seen a ghost:
Shane Warne’s first Ashes delivery!

From that time on he played with the batsman’s mind,
From Brisbane to Durban he had them in such a bind.
To go forward or back, to play or abstain,
Intensely the pressure built up in the brain,
And always the chirping from behind!

Mr Warne on his phone sent a lot of texts
‘Cause he liked to have quite a lot of sex.
He took a prohibited pill to lose his love handles,
Said “Mum gave it to me!” – what a terrible scandal!
We wondered “What will Warney do next?”

Shane Warne – truly a sporting magician,
Always played like a man on a mission.
Each time he came in to bat or to bowl
He believed in his powers to take control
Even when he was not in the peak of condition.

Shane Warne bowled with his friend Glen McGrath,
In Sydney they took their last hurrah.
Now Ponting and Taylor, Steve Waugh all agree
To have two such men they were lucky indeed,
Shane Warne and his good friend Glen McGrath.
Ooh ah!

Behind the Bowler's Arm

It's been a hard hard year, pushing shit up hill,
But shit happens all the time and I guess it always will.
Now the days are getting long, summer's on its way,
And I can't wait for Christmas time, because the day after is Boxing Day,
And you'll know where to find me, ten rows back at the M.C.G
Right behind the bowler's arm.

So leave your worries at the farm, don't fret about the rain,
Hold your credit at the store, bring the kids down on the train.
Meet me on the Richmond side just outside the gate,
I want to see the very first ball but no sweat if you're running late.

'Cause you know where to find me, there's no place I'd rather be
Right behind the bowler's arm.

And if we're lucky we might see someone make a ton or slashing fifty,
Yeah if we're lucky there might be a bowling spell of sheer wizardry.
But probably nothing much will happen at all
(Even if David Boon makes a century nothing much happens).

When the angels add my days and say my time is up,
I'll say to them now hold on please there's one thing you forgot.
I know each man must leave this world behind when he gets called,
But we had a deal that you won't count the days I watched the bat & ball.

And the angels, they'll know where to find me,
There's no place I'd rather be
Right behind the bowlers,
They'll know where to find me, ten rows back with sunburnt knees,
Right behind the bowler's arm.

You Can't Take it With You

You might have a happy family, nice house, fine car.
You might be successful in real estate,
You could even be a football star.
You might have a prime-time TV show seen in every home and bar,
But you can't take it with you.

You might own a great big factory, oil wells on sacred land.
You might be in line for promotion, with a foolproof retirement plan.
You might have your money in copper, textiles or imports from Japan,
But you can't take it with you.

You can't take it with you though you might pile it up high.
It's so much easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye.

You might have a body of fine proportion and a hungry mind,
A handsome face and a flashing wit, lips that kiss and eyes that shine.
There might be a queue all around the block
Long before your starting time,
But you can't take it with you.

You might have a great reputation so carefully made
And a set of high ideals, polished up and so well displayed.
You might have a burning love inside, so refined, such a special grade,
But you can't take it with you.

Sweet Guy

In the morning we wreck the bed,
You bring me coffee black and boiling.
Then we start up again and the coffee goes cold.
I wake up drinking from your lips,
Kisses warm and tender,
And I'd give up the world just to see you smile!

One thing I will never understand
(It's become my problem)
And it's something that's right out of my hands
(My hands are clean)
What makes such a sweet guy turn so mean?

I went to town with a moody man,
a handsome Dr. Jekyll,
He was right by my side turning into Mr. Hyde.
I ran for cover but I ran too slow,
I was stitched by strangers,
And they shook their heads that someone could do the things you did!

One thing I will never understand
(It's become my problem),
And it's something that's right out of my hands
(My hands are clean)
What makes such a sweet guy turn so mean??

I must be mad, I must be crazy,
Everyone tells me so.
Everyday I see it coming,
Now I'm facing the wall, waiting for the blow.
In the morning you kiss my head,
You say it was another.
Now you're down on your knees
Begging me to forgive you please!
I wake up aching from your touch,
Every muscle tender,
Then I look in your eyes, the way you smile,
And I'm hypnotized.

One thing I will never understand
(It's become my problem)
And it's something that's right out of my hands
(My hands are clean)
What makes such a sweet guy turn so mean?

Careless

How many cabs in New York City, how many angels on a pin?
How many notes in a saxophone, how many tears in a bottle of gin?
How many times did you call my name, knock at the door but you couldn't get in?

I know I've been careless.

I've been wrapped up in a shell, nothing could get through to me,
Acted like I didn't know I had friends and family.
I saw worry in their eyes, it didn't look like fear to me.

I know I've been careless,
I lost my tenderness.
I've been careless,
I took bad care of this.

Like a mixture in a bottle, like a frozen over lake,
Like a long-time, painted smile I got so hard I had to crack.
You were there, you held the line, you're the one that brought me back.

I know I've been careless,
I lost my tenderness.
I've been careless,
I took bad care of this.

How many cabs in New York City, how many angels on a pin?
How many notes in a saxophone, how many tears in a bottle of gin?
How many times did you call my name, knock at the door but you couldn't get in?
How many stars in the milky way, how many ways can you lose a friend?

Everything's Turning to White

Late on a Friday my husband went up to the mountains with three friends.
They took provisions and bottles of bourbon to last them all through the weekend.

One hundred miles they drove just to fish in a stream,
And there's so much water so close to home.

When they arrived it was cold and dark; they set up their camp quickly,
Warmed up with whiskey they walked to the river where the water flowed past darkly.

In the moonlight they saw the body of a young girl floating face down,
And there's so much water so close to home.

When he holds me now I'm pretending,
I feel like I'm frozen inside,
And behind my eyes, my daily disguise,
Everything's turning to white.

It was too hard to tell how long she'd been dead, the river was that close to freezing,

But one thing for sure, the girl hadn't died very well to judge from the bruising.
They stood there above her all thinking the same thoughts at the same time:
There's so much water so close to home.

They carried her downstream from their fishing,
Between two rocks they gently wedged her.
After all, they'd come so far, it was late,
And the girl would keep, she was going nowhere.
They stayed up there fishing for two days,
They reported it on Sunday when they came back down.
There's so much water so close to home.

When he holds me now I'm pretending,
Nothing is working inside,
And behind my eyes, my daily disguise,
Everything's turning to white.

The newspapers said that the girl had been strangled to death and also molested.
On the day of the funeral the radio reported that a young man had been arrested.
I went to the service a stranger, I drove past the lake out of town.
There's so much water so close to home.

When he holds me now I'm pretending,
Nothing is working inside,
And behind my eyes, my daily disguise,
Everything's turning to white.

Winter Coat

We were lovers once long ago,
Walking through cold city streets like lovers do.
Stopped inside a market,
Kissed beside a stall,
Someone said 'You'd better move on if you're not buying at all!'

Then I saw the winter coat hanging on the rack,
I thought about that winter coat hanging on my back.
So you helped me try it on.
It was just my size
Then you bought that coat for me after haggling over the price.

Now when it's chilly
Up in these cold, cold hills
I just put on my winter coat,
My winter coat keeps me warm.

Years have come along,
Years have gone,
Some friends have risen,
Some have moved on,
And my old winter coat still hangs by my front door,
Holding all the stories I don't remember anymore.

And when it gets freezing
Up in these cold, cold hills,
I just put on my winter coat,
My winter coat keeps me warm.

Love Never Runs on Time

I pulled out of the suburbs by sunset.
Rain was falling, it looked like it would for a while.
I had a radio, a six-pack and some cigarettes,
The radio died after the first hundred miles.
I sang all the way to the border and guess who starred in every rhyme?
Ah you know and I know that love never runs on time.

I followed that old river 'til the morning.
I stopped, I don't remember the name of the town,
But the colour of the coffee was a warning,
It was the colour of the river but not nearly as brown.
The waitress poured me another, I guess she was feeling kind,
You know and I know that love never runs on time.

You're lost in the traffic,
I've been asking around, but you haven't been seen.
I never thought we were perfect
Oh but darling-what we could have been!

The rain came and went all the next day,
I pulled over sometime for a sleep on the side,
Then I gunned her back out on the highway,
Hit a big pot-hole and the radio came alive.
I never heard a love song yet that I could call yours and mine
'Cause you know and I know that love never runs on time.

When I First Met Your Ma

When I first met your mother
I was playing in a bar.
She walked in with my girlfriend,
My foolish girlfriend brought her there.
She looked so pretty and dangerous
As she brushed back her hair
And I was not the only one
Taking notice in that bar
When I first met your ma.

When I first kissed your mother
I was single once again.
We walked through Fitzroy Gardens,
There she took my hand.
We could not stop our kissing
Then she whispered in my ear,
'Soon you'll get to know me,
So let's not go too far!'
When I first kissed your ma.

Love like a bird flies away.
You'll find out the only way.
Love like a bird flies away.

When we first lay together
Inside her father's house,
We tried so to be quiet
As we held each other close.
Then her dad came pounding and kicked me out of there.
I walked two miles in Melbourne rain,
I could have walked ten more
When I first loved your ma.

Love like a bird flies away.
You'll find out the only way.
Love like a bird flies away.

Other People's Houses

His mother always let him stay up late on Fridays. They would lie in her room together watching Tv. Sometimes she fell asleep before he did and he'd be watching a talk show-one person talking, then another, then all this laughter coming from nowhere. Next thing he knew she would be shaking him gently. Wake up little one, wake up.' Saturday morning. So he'd get up, dress himself, put his shoes on and leave the house without breakfast. Breakfast always came later in other people's houses.

They had to catch two buses to reach their destination and the trip seemed to take forever unless he fell asleep along the way. When they got off at their stop they were in a bigger, brighter neighbourhood. The houses were a long way back from the street and some of them were hidden from view by big hedges. Looking down the street was like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. His mother guided him through this country. She knew exactly where to go. She carried in her bag a big, heavy ring full of keys-all keys to other people's houses.

She would turn one of the keys in the lock. Some of the doors needed two keys. Then presto they were in. The houses had so many things in them yet still so much space. He liked to rub his feet quickly on the thick pile then touch a door knob with one finger and give himself a small electric shock. In the first house they always went straight to the refrigerator. There were things in there he couldn't imagine anyone ever eating-strange looking pastes in jars and horrible concoctions in plastic. His mother would sit him down with a jam sandwich and a glass of milk, then set to work cleaning other people's houses.

And so they would go all day long from one house to another, his mother scrubbing, mopping, vacuuming, cleaning, tidying up, leaving him to his own devices. Often, if no one was home, she would play music on the stereo. There was one record she always put on and sang along to. It had two men and two women on the cover and they all looked sort of blonde except one of the women had dark hair. The stereo flickered like the controls of a spaceship. Other houses were full of books and sometimes he was allowed to take one of the books down from the shelves and open it up. There were books on war and cricket and movie stars. He liked to look at the pictures and pick out big words that he knew. He was very careful with the books. He was very careful with everything in other people's houses.

Many of the houses had other children in them. They would rush right past him into the yard. He'd follow them out back where the back yard was as big as the house, sometimes even bigger. He'd play with them for a while then sit on the steps watching them. He felt slower than the others. There was a girl about his age who lived in a house they went to every second Saturday. Her name was Stephanie. She used to take him everywhere with her, wherever she went, all around the house, even into her room. He'd never see his mother until it was time to leave. One Saturday his mother told him that Stephanie and her family had moved away. Just like that. He still thinks of her now, twenty years later, moving, laughing, sitting down to dinner, making conversation, making love in other people's houses.

Rally Round the Drum

Like my brother before me
I'm a tent boxing man,
Like our daddy before us
Travelling all around Gippsland.
I woke up one cold morning
Many miles from Fitzroy,
And slowly it came dawning
By Billy Leach I was employed.

Rally round the drum boys,
Rally round the drum,
Every day, every night boys,
Rally round the drum.

Hoisting tent pole and tarpaulin,
Billy says 'Now beat the drum!'
Rings out across the showgrounds
And all the country people come.
Then Billy starts a-calling
'Step right up, step right up, one and all,
Is there anybody game here
To take on Kid Snowball?'

Rally round the drum boys,
Rally round the drum,
Every day, every night boys,
Rally round the drum.

Sometimes I fight a gee-man,
Yeah we put on a show,
Sometimes I fight a hard man,
Who wants to lay me low.
Sometimes I get tired
But I don't ever grouse,
I've got to keep on fighting,
Five dollars every house.

Rally round the drum boys,
Rally round the drum,
Every day, every night boys,
Rally round the drum.

Like my daddy before me
I stand up and knock 'em down,
Like my brother before me
I'm weaving in your town.

Yeah, rally round the drum boys,
Rally round the drum,
Got to keep on fighting,
Rally round the drum.

Beggar on the Street of Love

In my time I have been a rich man giving favours,
All the world at my feet and its many different flavours.
I sucked it all dry,
Now I realise
I'm a beggar on the street of love.

All the rest have no charm,
There's nothing they can give me.
What I want makes me poor
In this great big world of plenty.
I'm holding out my cup,
Only you can fill it up.
I'm a beggar on the street of love.

On my own I'm standing, so patiently,
And my heart keeps calling, calling out for you to see.
You look right through me and you pass me by.

Take my hand, lead me to your loving milk and honey,
Cover me, keep me from the night so cold and rainy,
Please, I'm down on my knees,
I'm a beggar on the street of love.

Deeper Water

On a crowded beach in a distant time,
At the height of summer see a boy of five,
At the water's edge so nimble and free,
Jumping over the ripples looking way out to sea.

Now a man comes up from amongst the throng,
Takes the young boy's hand and his hand is strong,
And the child feels safe, yeah the child feels brave
As he's carried in those arms up and over the waves.

Deeper water, deeper water, deeper water, calling him on.

Let's move forward now and the child's seventeen
With a girl in the back seat tugging at his jeans,
And she knows what she wants, she guides with her hand,
As a voice cries inside him --- I'm a man, I'm a man!

Deeper water, deeper water, deeper water, calling him on.

Now the man meets a woman unlike all the rest,
He doesn't know it yet but he's out of his depth.
And he thinks he can run, it's a matter of pride,
But he keeps coming back like a cork on the tide.

Well the years hurry by and the woman loves the man,
Then one night in the dark she grabs hold of his hand,
Says 'There, can you feel it kicking inside!'
And the man gets a shiver right up and down his spine.

Deeper water, deeper water, deeper water, calling him on.

So the clock moves around and the child is a joy,
But Death doesn't care just who it destroys.
Now the woman gets sick, thins down to the bone,
She says 'Where I'm going next, I'm going alone!'

On a distant beach lonely and wild,
At a later time, see a man and a child,
And the man takes the child up into his arms,
Takes her over the breakers
To where the water is calm.

Deeper water, deeper water, deeper water, calling them on.

How to Make Gravy

Hello Dan, it's Joe here, I hope you're keeping well.
It's the 21st of December, and now they're ringing the last bells.
If I get good behaviour, I'll be out of here by July.
Won't you kiss my kids on Christmas Day, please don't let 'em cry for me!
I guess the brothers are driving down from Queensland,
Stella's flying in from the coast.
They say it's gonna be a hundred degrees, even more maybe, but that won't stop
the roast.
Who's gonna make the gravy now? I bet it won't taste the same!
Just add flour, salt, a little red wine and don't forget a dollop of tomato sauce for
sweetness and that extra tang.

And give my love to Angus and to Frank and Dolly,
Tell 'em all I'm sorry I screwed up this time,
And look after Rita, I'll be thinking of her early Christmas morning
When I'm standing in line.

I hear Mary's got a new boyfriend, I hope he can hold his own.
Do you remember the last one? What was his name again?
(Just a little too much cologne!)
And Roger, you know I'm even gonna miss Roger,
'Cause there's sure as hell no one in here I want to fight!
Oh praise the Baby Jesus, have a Merry Christmas,
I'm really gonna miss it, all the treasure and the trash,
And later in the evening, I can just imagine,
You'll put on Junior Murvin and push the tables back,
And you'll dance with Rita, I know you really like her,
Just don't hold her too close, oh brother please don't stab me in the back!
I didn't mean to say that, it's just my mind it plays up,
Multiplies each matter, turns imagination into fact!
You know I love her badly, she's the one to save me,
I'm gonna make some gravy, I'm gonna taste the fat,
Tell her that I'm sorry, yeah I love her badly, tell 'em all I'm sorry,
And kiss the sleepy children for me.
You know one of these days, I'll be making gravy,
I'll be making plenty, I'm gonna pay 'em all back.

Little Kings

I'm so afraid for my country,
There's an ill wind blowing no good,
So many lies in the name of history,
They want to improve my neighbourhood.

I'm so worried about my brother,
He just gets sadder every day.
We gotta take care of each other
Or else we're gonna have to pay.

In the land of the little kings
There's a price on everything,
And everywhere the little kings
Are getting away with murder.

I was born in a lucky country,
Every day I hear the warning bells.
They're so busy building palaces,
They don't see the poison in the wells.

In the land of the little kings
Profit is the only thing,
And everywhere the little kings
Are getting away with murder.

In the land of the little kings
Justice don't mean a thing,
And everywhere the little kings
Are getting away with murder.

She Answers the Sun (Lazy Bones)

HIM:

Wake up lazybones,
I've been watching you and wandering,
And now the morning's gone.
Hello lazybones.
I've never known someone to sleep so long beneath the sun.
Open your eyes now, I'm on your stairs,
Look what I've brought you, mangoes and pears,
Coffee and kisses for your freckles and red hair.

HER:

Sticks and stones may hurt my bones
But names you know will never ever hurt me.
Call me lazybones
I don't mind 'cause lazybones I was born to be,
I need my beauty and beauty needs sleep,
So go from my window my beauty to keep,
Freckles and red hair, they're only skin deep.

HIM: Open your eyes now.

HER: I need my sleep.

HIM: Look what I've brought you.

HER: They're yours to keep.

HIM: Freckles and red hair.

HER: They're only skin deep.

Melting

At the back of my grandmother's house there was a hill
With a tangled garden, thick and wild.
We used to go there, you and I, as children,
Slipping away from the aunts and uncles and their homemade brew.
We carried our ice creams in the summer sun
Trying to make them last as long as we could.
Pretty soon they started to run,
Dripping down our arms, dripping on the ground,
Melting.

We sat under the trees smoking bark,
Lighting little fires and stompin' each one out.
As the summer went on the flames grew higher.
We just stared and stared and stared at everything melting,
Melting.

At the back of my grandmother's house there was a hill,
Black and smoking at the end of the day.
We watched the fire trucks go back on down the road,
We heard them calling out our names.
We were standing in the shadows, melting,
Melting, melting.

Now my grandmother's house is a supermarket,
And I'm far away, living in a colder city,
And tonight I've pulled the top off a bottle of beer
And I've lit a fire and I'm staring, staring,
Where are you, where are you now?
You're melting, we're all melting, melting, melting, melting.

Our Sunshine

There came a man on a stolen horse
And he rode right onto the page,
Burning bright but not for long,
Lit up with a holy rage.
No turning back for the child of grace
With the blood red on his hand,
Never known to hurt a woman
He never robbed an honest man.
His mother held in jail, his daddy dead,
And daily rising, the price upon his head.

Our sunshine, our sunshine,
Through fire and flood, through tears and blood,
Through dust and mud still riding on.

Forever trapped in a suit of steel
With the hotel burning behind,
Betrayed by his companions,
And the train waiting down the line,
Forever tall on a bareback horse,
Getting through by the skin of his teeth.
It's one more for the ladies,
Now one more for the police!
Riding all night hungry, tired and cold,
Into the misty morning
He'll never grow old.

Our sunshine, our sunshine,
Through fire and flood, through tears and blood,
Through dust and mud still riding on.

As he stood before the judge's chair,
He said 'I'm free and easy --- I'll see you there!'

Our sunshine, our sunshine,
Through fire and flood, through tears and blood,
Through dust and mud still riding on.

Gathering Storm

I had a dream,
I saw you walking down the road
In a gathering storm.

Wind on the rise,
A black crow was flying,
You alone in a gathering storm.

I wake up alone in my bed,
There's nothing before my eyes,
And outside the door
Only the sighing,
And you out there in a gathering storm.

So cover your head,
Keep your eyes open,
Make speed in the gathering storm.

I rise up and turn on the light,
Now it's shining in my window.
My walls are strong,
My chimney's smoking,
God speed you
In the gathering storm.

The Oldest Story in the Book

Tom and Harry were the best of friends,
They called themselves The Dharma Bums,
Lit out from their home and kin
With a mandolin and a pair of thumbs.
They worked side by side all the summer
Picking those grapes from the vine,
Read by one light, took turns to cook,
The oldest story in the book.

Enter Richard and his sister, June
Just before the season's end.
Richard's guitar knows a whole lotta tunes,
Harry starts a-picking on the mandolin.
Down by the dam in the moonlight
They play 'til their fingers are sore.
When June kisses Tom, Harry doesn't know where to look,
The oldest story in the book.

The band pull into town in the afternoon,
They've got a hit song on the radio.
Richard calls up his sister, June
And says 'Do you want to come along to the show?'
June scrapes the money together for a babysitter.
Tom's working late, she's glad she's on her own,
Especially when Harry sings that song about the girl
By the lake and how the moonlight looked,
The oldest story in the book.

Nothing But A Dream

High on a hill, deep in a forest
At the end of a lonely road,
Inside a house of New Zealand timber
Lives a young queen all on her own.
She took me in and did her healing
And said 'You can stay if you know when to go,
But don't take too much when you start your stealing,
Just a little's enough --- you're the one who should know!'

You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing but a dream, nothing as it seems.
You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing as it seems, nothing but a dream.

She sat me down at her dark piano
And said 'Can you play me that old Spanish song?
I know a verse and all of the chorus
But there's just one chord I keep getting wrong.'
She threw down three coins and said 'There's a purpose
In all that we do, every fall of a leaf.
Now drink from this cup, I made you a potion
And lay yourself down and get you some sleep.'

You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing but a dream, nothing as it seems.
You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing as it seems, nothing but a dream.

I woke to the sound of somebody strumming,
She held in her hands a parlour guitar.
She said 'If you like this song that I'm strumming
Take it with you, it's only a prayer.'

You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing but a dream, nothing as it seems.
You will fall, you will fall,
Nothing as it seems, nothing but a dream.

Forty-Eight Angels

Twelve angels from the north,
Twelve angels from the east,
Twelve angels from the south,
Twelve angels from the west
Coming for to carry me away.

Angels shooting from your brow,
Angels leaping from your mouth,
Angels lighting on your shoulders,
East and west and north and south
Coming for to carry me away.

Angels flying from your fingers,
Angels dancing on your breast,
Angels happy just to linger,
North and south and east and west
Coming for to carry me away.

Angels sleeping in your hair,
Angels resting at your feet,
Angels singing on your stairs,
South and north and west and east
Coming for to carry me away.

Angels in the inky night,
Angels when the day breaks forth,
Angels at the noonday table,
West and east and south and north
Coming for to carry me away.

They Thought I Was Asleep

We were driving back from the country one night,
Mum and dad up the front and the rest of us snug and tight,
My kid brother grizzled for a little minute
'Til my big sister told him he'd better quit or die.
It had been a long day in the countryside
Playing with the cousins on my mother's side,
The sound of the radio closed our eyes drifting over the seat
And then I fell asleep.

I don't know what woke me up,
Maybe a country song or a big truck passing by.
I could hear my mama and papa talking,
Papa said something then mama began to cry.
No more words then, just soft sobs and my head began to throb.
I just lay there playing dog breathing slow and deep,
They thought I was asleep.
They thought I was asleep.

It seemed forever 'til the sobbing stopped
Then they talked for a little while but just too soft to hear.
Daddy kept looking at the side of her face,
One hand on the wheel and one hand stroking her hair,
The headlights shining from the other way
Showed tears on the cheeks of daddy's face.
I prayed for Jesus to send his grace
And all our souls to keep.
Back then I believed.
They thought I was asleep,
The night was dark and deep,
How I wish I was asleep.

Meet Me in the Middle of the Air

I am your true shepherd,
I will lead you there.
Beside still waters
Come and meet me in the middle of the air,
I will meet you in the middle of the air.

I will lay you down
In pastures green and fair.
Every soul shall be restored,
I will meet them in the middle of the air,
Come and meet me in the middle of the air.

Through the lonesome valley,
My rod and staff you'll bear,
Fear not death's dark shadow,
Come and meet me in the middle of the air,
I will meet you in the middle of the air.

With oil I shall anoint you,
A table shall I prepare,
Your cup will runneth over,
Come and meet me in the middle of the air,
I will meet you in the middle of the air.

In my house you'll dwell forever,
You shall not want for care.
Surely goodness and mercy will follow you,
Come and meet me in the middle of the air,
I will meet you in the middle of the air.

Stumbling Block

I can't get around it and I can't get through it.
I can't go over it and I can't go under it.
I'm scared of what I might find if I ever get behind it,
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

If I wait a while it just might go away.
I suppose I should just get down on my knees and pray.
I'm sure if I could get just one good night's sleep it'll look better in the day,
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

Maybe I should pay someone to come here and remove it
Or I could just chip away at it bit by little bit.
I guess I could build me a bomb and blow it up in one big hit.
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

Some of my friends say I should call in a mystic
Or find me a philosopher to come here and tell me it don't exist:
Then there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

If I ever get done with this I'll make a brand new start.
I gotta get my thinking straight and put the horse before the cart.
If I had the balls I'd wrap this thing up in plastic and call it art!
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

I'm gonna call up every TV station
And the museum of science, maybe they're looking for a special donation.
I could sell tickets and take it on tour all around the whole goddamn nation,
Stumbling block, stumbling block, stumbling block.

It's in your mind, she says, it's within you,
She likes saying stuff like that, I got a problem if it's true.
If you can't get rid of what's inside you it's bound to destroy you!
Stumbling block, stumbling, block, stumbling block.

Down to my Soul

We light the dark and lie us down to pray,
All night long we keep the dogs at bay.
If I had my time over again
You know that I wouldn't change a thing.
You touch me down to my soul,
Down to my soul.

You wake me up speaking dreams at dawn,
I reach and touch the fine lines time has drawn.
For all the world I wouldn't trade my place,
Your mixed up tears falling on my face.
You touch me down to my soul,
Down to my soul.

No other kiss ever felt like this-such tenderness,
Oh, give me one more kiss 'cause every time we kiss
All heaven breaks loose!
You touch me down to my soul,
Down to my soul.

The Ballad of Queenie and Rover

Queenie was born on the banks of the great Ord River, 1930, maybe,
Her mother was black, her daddy white.
Daddy was a fine horse breaker, mama sang the songs of the old lawmakers,
She used to hide young Queenie in the bush,
Rub black charcoal all over her hair and her face
Every time the police came around, looking for any blonde-haired brown-skinned children
To round 'em all up, take 'em on down town.

Shine on, shine on, immortal one,
Shine on, shine on, immortal one.

Rover was born in the desert, lived out there 'til his mother died,
Then he moved around a lot from place to place,
Bedford Downs, Bow River, Lissadell, Wyndham,
Building fences, working as a stockman.
Then he had a series of dreams,
Started painting what he'd heard and seen,
Rainbow serpent, Krill Krill, Cyclone Tracy, the killing fields,
Everything that lives and breathes.

Ride on, ride on, immortal ones,
Ride on, ride on, immortal ones.

When Rover and Queenie were young they met out on Texas Downs station,
She worked as a cook there for a long long time.
She said "Hey, Cowboy!" later on she said,
"Nice boy, good worker, top rider, lucky one, that one!"
One day a mean horse ripped the scalp from his head,
She stitched him up with a boiled needle and thread
Good as any doctor, they were friends everafter.
She said "I wanna paint!" He said "I'll teach ya!"
They died within months of each other.

Ride on, ride on, immortal ones,
Shine on, shine on, immortal ones,
Your story will always run,
Forever run,
Forever young.

Please Leave Your Light On

Please leave your light on for me,
Let it shine all through the night.
I know by now you're not expecting me,
I've been so long out of sight.

I'm coming through the darkest hour now, Mama,
Don't give up on me just yet.
I got no excuses for you
But I sure got some regrets,
Yeah, I sure got some regrets.

I went out from the halls of grace,
My soul turned into stone.
Please leave your light on for me
'Cause I've been taking the long way home.

Please go easy when you see me, Mama,
I just might fall apart.
I know I've tried your patience,
I know I've stretched your heart.

The sky fell down hard upon me,
I've been crawling in the dirt.
Nobody's fault but mine for sure
And not just me who's hurt,
Yeah, not just me who's hurt.

I went out from the halls of grace,
Turned my back on my own.
Please leave your light on for me,
I've been taking the long way home.

The Chimes of Midnight

Sitting here thinking
By a high window.
Lights are blinking
Down below.

Some things never
Let you rest ---
The smell of her hair
Spread across my chest.

The chimes of midnight
Beat the air,
The chimes of midnight
Will take me there.

Her dark eyes wept,
Oh, how they shone.
I watched her tears
Flow like wine.

She leaned into me
And held me close,
I thought I heard her say
“We are the ghosts!”

The chimes at midnight
Sound a hollow tone,
The chimes at midnight
Are taking me home.

Some things never
Let you be ---
Her walking to me
Out of the sea.

The chimes at midnight
Ring out so clear,
Now I’m ready
To disappear.

You won’t see me,
I’ll be on the air.
The chimes at midnight
Are taking me there.

From my high window
I’m stepping on to the air.

Night Ride

Empty platforms come and go
As I peer out the cold window.
She must be fast asleep by now
Breathing soft and sweet and low.

The night is dark, the dark is sheer,
Not a single leaf is clear.
The moon is deep behind the clouds ---
The longest evening of the year.

And now my seat begins to shake
With the shudder of the brakes.
The stranger on my shoulder stirs
And deeply blushes as she wakes.

The night is full of things that creep
And I have scars that will not weep
And miles to go before I sleep.

OUYANG YU

b. 1955

Ouyang Yu was born in Huangzhou, China, in 1955. In 1983 he graduated from Wuhan Institute of Hydro-Electric Engineering (now Wuhan University) with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and American Literature, and in 1989 he completed a Master of Arts in Australian and English Literature at East China Normal University in Shanghai. After a brief period as a lecturer in English at Wuhan University, he left China for Australia in 1991 to commence a PhD at La Trobe University on the representation of the Chinese in Australian literature. He completed his doctorate in 1995.

Since arriving in Australia, Yu has commenced an extraordinarily prolific literary career as a poet, critic, translator, editor and novelist. In 1996, he co-founded Australia's first Chinese-language literary journal *Otherland [Yuanxiang]*, which he has continued to run as editor. He has received a number of grants and awards for his work, both as an editor and translator, and has spent periods as a writer-in-residence and as a research fellow at various Australian universities. He was also Professor of Australian Literature at Wuhan University in China from 2005-2008.

Yu's poems, written both in English and in Chinese, have appeared in numerous Australian literary journals and newspapers, and have been frequently anthologised. His first poetry collection, *Moon Over Melbourne*, was published in 1995, and has been followed by a dozen further collections. He has also published novels in both Chinese (*Fen nu Wu Zili [The Angry Wu Zili]*, 1999), and English (*The Eastern Slopes Chronicle*, 2002). Noted particularly for his often caustic exploration of Australian cultural and multicultural identities, Yu is also recognized for his fine command of poetic craft.

His latest book of Chinese poetry, titled, *shifeishi* (poemnonpoem), was published in September, 2011, by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House. And his latest book of bilingual poetry, *Self Translation*, was published by Transit Lounge in August 2012.

Ouyang Yu was nominated one of the Top 100 Most Influential Melbournians for the year 2011 as well as the Top 10 most influential writers of Chinese origin in the Chinese diaspora.

Ouyang Yu is a skilled poet, critic, academic, translator and prose-writer. Operating in two languages and closely, caustically interrogating Australia's cultural identity and diversity, Yu's work typifies a present future of Australian poetry. His work matches a strident political voice with a tightly tuned lyrical self. Yu's often savage humour is matched by his musical gifts as a technician-poet, and his unrelenting ability to sheer a subject back to its basic truths and half-truths. Clear-eyed scepticism betrays a generous plain-speaking heart, which has led to his successes as a poet internationally. His is a voice to attend not simply for its poetry but its insight into the broader and immediate contemporary world beyond poetry.

Song for an Exile in Australia

in a loveless season in Australia
the body is passing through the sun of spring
decaying gradually disconnected with life
so I cover up every face of clocks
to forget time
to forget every face that lifts up
from under the white shroud of corpses
the spring has lost its power of medium
and the body can't understand its own meaning
woodenly I wait for the coming of dusk
knowing very well that nothing will come out of it
like every disappearing season
that will not leave her shadows

in a poemless season in Australia
I read my poems of the past
like a stranger in hundreds of years
reading books left to him by his ancestors
I see thousands of lines
shoot past the edge of dreams
but my paralysed brain can't pull itself out of
the wheel-chair of imagination
like my decayed body

in a riverless season in Australia
the boundless grass land drives me crazy
for my skin is thirsty for the baptism by murky rivers
and my train of thoughts is chasing waves
that can rush a thousand miles a second
listen! the lawn-mower next door starts its routine

cutting hair for the spring mourning for the season
hoping to find a fault in the ground
where there is a fault there is life running

in a season without languages in Australia
I have lost my weight in undeveloped no-person's land
like a wild devil roaming
I sow my language into the alien soil
where it sends forth strange flowers that no one recognises
and all of a sudden I find my tongue held
between two languages like a vice

in a season of self-exile in Australia
I feel doubly alienated
the death of the old world has such weird attractions
while the light of the new world has somehow darkened

in a season without love in Australia
my body my poetry
in a season without languages in Australia
my interference, my waves of electricity
in a season without death in Australia
I see the black cat acquiring an eternal existence
in the afternoon sun and I see
the reflection of a car above the distant trees

in a season without imagination
in a desireless season
in Australia
in Australia

in Australia

The Day Nothing Happened in Melbourne

You wanted to write poems that day
but you had nothing to write with
you hadn't brought a piece of paper
you didn't have a pen
no one could help
everybody was driving his own car double screened
by the wind-shield
from the rear mirror the other person could see you
but you could only see another one in another car
while the green light was urging you to go on

your home was a garden
with deep grass and stable flowers
the sun had some shadow of trees and wind in it
you had problems but you couldn't
nothing could make you happen

the oncoming rain was bizarre with sunshine and impatience
a red raincoat was passing slowly along the grassy path
long as a century
you were watching drops of rain being absorbed
into the texture of the window pane
until the figure in the drop had disappeared and
nothing else happened

you burst into shouting and you saw the black sun-bathing cat
climb over the wall
reading time in his cupped hands
your son was sitting

his head low on the stone used for holding the door
you could do nothing but watch the wind dancing on
the branches in unison with
the singing of a bird praying:
nothing ever happens in Melbourne

that day
the six-thirty SBS came on with its routine of world news
that day
coffee-drinkers did not forget to glance at their Age of the day
that day
you thought you could do something
that would shake the world to its foundation—
but you were scribbling... and scribbling...
nothing really happened

you had lost history and yesterday

they were in a river into which you would only have to bury
your head to see—
that all you have in Melbourne is
nothing that happens

3 [i'm disjointed]

i'm disjointed
my head and my heart are disconnected
i suppose i am writing poetry
out of time and place
i suppose i'm writing for myself
without the slightest idea where it should lead
the spring is at an end
the summer begins to assault my eyes with pollens
i'm what you'd call a missing person
missing from the history of today
missing from anthologies collections compilations bibliographies
of jealous exclusion
but i'm squeezing in like a piece of rain
from a crevice in the sky
of stunted imagination
their civilization is too much of a good thing
we die
even in life

4 [i have laid myself down in the corner of an australian suburb]

i have laid myself down in the corner of an australian suburb
looking up i see the blue sky forever hanging there
without movement without sound
i wonder why i am here
but my sleep is sweet

it obliterates all the senses all the memories
once again i find myself talking to myself
with a pen or a machine
summer of their festival is boring
i don't have anyone to blame
the poem is the ultimate meaning
i realize i'm writing about nothing
as days near the end
so i am
nearer my beginning
hours of total abandon to senselessness
on a red sofa
like in a red boat of rambeau's
floating down the river
of forever forgetfulness

10 [don't blame me for having stopped writing altogether]

don't blame me for having stopped writing altogether
ever since i went west
what am i supposed to write about
and where am i supposed to publish
the chinese newspapers and magazines overseas being so money-minded
and sex-centred
taiwan and hong kong too far away
and the mainland too politically exclusive
my chinese daily growing stale
like an opened beer can
never drunk
or a too old body
that can't sell itself
even when fully exposed to the public view
day and night

how strange it is that you had thought anything was possible
once you went west
which was supposed to be the solution
to all the chinese communist problems:
overcrowding lack of sex weekly political sessions
centralized collectivism
worshipping of a deified personality repressive nationalism
instead
you find parallels:
overcrowding of objects
lack of good sex in a highly sex-charged society
weekly religious sessions
centralized individualism
worshipping of a personified deity
compressive nationalism
so that it suddenly dawns on you that whatever you write
will be a mirror image of the other
depending on which languages you choose
which perspectives you employ

perhaps it's not so simple
as a writer you feel that your own language is essential
so central that it has to engage with its own themes
in its own terminology
incapable of being expressed by any other languages
no matter how many people are using it
like your own penis
biologically and racially determined
that will only enter the tunnel

of the same language

prepared generations before
by your knowing ancestors
once you are without that language
you are a linguistic eunuch
who will know all the essentials and ingredients of love
like a book
but not the pleasure of it
your new tongue
in the form of the old
becomes babyish

it's probably because of this that you decide to stop writing
though you never even tell me
your oldest friend
what's the point you say
once the thought-catching machine is invented
you only have to apply its feelers onto your
head
to catch the flow of all the thoughts through your brain
and turn them automatically into your own languages
on a floppy disk of either macintosh or ibm
all i do now you say
is wait for that very moment of human progress
to retrieve all the things i have thought of
from this central-australia of a brain of mine

68 [the dreams are no longer viable]

the dreams are no longer viable
the feasibility study is but one
of the impossibilities
for the future
we are living in the ruins of history
in our memory of a past
no longer available
except in
words
we love
ever so timidly
our freedom
but someone else's boast
and a sure road to self annihilation
we lie down in this forgotten corner of the earth
carving our fitful dreams
on the greyness of the screen
even when they never appear the same
aware of the approaching age
we look and look
but find nothing in the mirror of ourselves

Impressions of an Autumn

when the heart-shaped leaves fall from the april branches again
my feelings become withered and desolate once more
i am smoking a cigarette in the middle of the night
flipping off this section of my life from the ash
in the world of vacuum
i listen to the regular breathing of home appliances
no longer understanding what life really means
i happen to remember that it is easter today
but see the autumn turn into a thick slug
erect with two antennas that cannot receive any messages
crawling up my steps

time
is drawn into a trail of silver
i don't really have anything to say
the autumn sun, like before, keeps me narrow-eyed
my garden is still in decline
but i've never experienced any desire for return

the seeds sown last year
have now grown into weeds brain-high
at dusk there are thunderous insects chirruping
and i tell myself
that to live is but to keep
alive

in the autumn
of melbourne
where the wind is blowing
there is a withered sense of floating everywhere

moon over melbourne

in a night without time
when I mourn over the loss of
an ancient Chinese poem
a thousand years ago about now

but moon over melbourne
that knows nothing of *that*
a young one just 200 seconds old
with a man-made light that is not only cold

you mooch over melbourne
in an air-conditioned mood
how is it you look so bloody australian
so i-wouldn't-care-less tonight?

you have driven so many poets crazy in China
over the centuries
Li Bai with your nostalgic light at his bedstead
Li Yu with emotions so entangled he could hardly cut loose
because of you
Du Fu with you surging in mid-stream of the yangtze
Wen Tingyun with you on a frosty cock-crowing morning
Wang Wei with you shining through the pine trees
Zhang Ji with you down at midnight full of frost
and the arriving of a passenger boat
ouyang yu with you wandering lonely across a heavenly desert

moon over melbourne you bloody australian moon
you hang on you all right you no worries mate
you make me sick home sick for sure

you put every body to a multicultural sleep
who knows not what is meant by
one dancing with oneself and one's shadow under you

so contented with sharing the feeling
of planting proudly the rag of a flag
among your rocks

never mind their colonising instinct
for they lose you as soon as they touch you
tonight you belong to me

the Chinese are so poetically cheap
remember they say thousands of years ago in a poem:
for all the breeze and moon I get I don't need to spend a penny

the happiest are not the expensive

you are long colonised by us, by me
caught with lyrical lines
tamed with sleeplessness
Sinicized in a single character

moon over melbourne
you can't stop drunken engines
the weekend rage on a.b.c
the nameless night bird screeching grotesquely

moon over melbourne
mourn over melbourne
for the irretrievable poems lost to you
for the sleepy souls who wouldn't care less
for the nights that are so displaced here
for the dogs that bark so loyally

for me
for me
who refuses to go out again
dreading the sight of you
dreading the slightest suggestion of a memory
dreading so bloody dreading to see
the bloody bastard moon

over melbourne

Memory of a Night at Melbourne

it's a curious night
so dark and quiet
all the rooms are deserted like emptied bottles of beer
once more the feeling of death comes back to me
i gaze at things, they gaze back at me
i recall last night many nights before
in this graveyard of post-modern fantasy
that I have spent, flitting through page after page of
printed word of computerised messages
trying to work out what this night means
that urges me to write about last night
nights before
lies before:

you told yourself that you didn't want to go even if they'd ask you
because all your life you'd been trying to avoid the poets like death
they meant poverty, perversity, madness, melancholy, alcoholism,
absolute stupidity
you did go though to someone who lived at upton,
a deserted alley with solid fences made up of corrugated roof
and a safety lamp flashing on and off apparently for no purpose
there was no number not even on the curbs
for there was no curb
you said to yourself: jesus that's like a poet's place
rife with rape of love, murder of metaphor, violence of vice,
tears of hearts, death of prose, emotions of explosion
you simply hated them for being so wasteful
twice you went down the alleyway thinking to yourself
if there's anything you wouldn't want to be, it's being a poet
then you spent the next ten minutes driving through streets of
rainful red lights greening or yellowing

on the flying wings of your windscreen-wipers
while you were checking through a melway of namesakeness
until you knocked open her house....
what followed is not what you'd want to describe, really
it's all *deja vu*
adding to your conviction, you live among drunkards as poets
particularly poets like her
who did not even cast a glance in your direction
thinking maybe you were someone from hell
but you chased her intimate dog out of door
and you threw the latch to the ground
and left
after some 5 hours of drinking in the anonymity of faces
among them hers
like a butterfly of death flitting forever

from the corner of one eye to the corner of another

“I Love Sleep”

I love sleep knowing it is politically incorrect and culturally inappropriate
To say this but I love sleep not caring whether someone is going to bomb
The rialto tower or the Sydney opera house I love sleep at 46
For I don't remember anything about myself or what I do I love
Sleep lingering in my bed with a bit of dream here and there but nothing
substantial
To merit a mention I love sleep years ago in Wuhan while I was working
As a lorry driver in a shipping yard I had a roommate who loved sleep
The only two things he did was go to work in the factory lifting things and come
Back to sleep in our three-bed room “I love sleep” he said one night as we stood
On the bridge across a nameless creek that ran into the Yangtze River
“for I dream of things, beautiful things that you never will see anywhere in the
world”
I began to know that he was an orphan that he had nowhere to go on weekends
Things like that and I felt sad kind of for him and for myself I love sleep
And when I do so I know I am wasting my life knowing that I am wasting my
life
Anyway even if I do not sleep I cherish the time immediately after I wake up
For I hear the birds calling out to each other among themselves I do not hear
them in
sleep I become wordy soon I'll stop I love sleep I dream a little although I don't
recall
anything this morning I went to a friend's house to interview him he had a
beautiful
house that cost him nearly one million dollars off record he talked about his
plan
For afterwards he said he would love to lead a xianyun yehe life
I shared his view although I know ours would be different
For that kind of life of leisurely clouds and wild cranes
I love sleep correct me if I am wrong for in sleep I am equal to anyone
Without a fight

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JENNIFER HARRISON

b. 1955

Jennifer Harrison was born in Liverpool, in Sydney's western suburbs, in 1955. She studied medicine at the University of New South Wales, graduating in 1979, and subsequently trained in psychiatry. She spent time in Boston, USA, where she began writing poetry. Since the 1990s she has lived in Melbourne, where she has practised as a child psychiatrist specialising in developmental disorders.

Harrison began publishing her poetry in the mid-1990s. Her first collection, *Michelangelo's Prisoners* (1995), won the FAW Anne Elder award. The following year, she published a collaboratively-written collection of "composite poems" with fellow Melbourne poets Graham Henderson and K. F. Pearson, and a second solo volume, *Cambamatta/Cudmirrah*, a collection of poems in which Harrison reflects on the places where she grew up, exploring the connections between place, poetry and memory. Her third collection, *Dear B* (1998), contains a number of extended sequences dealing with both her own experience of illness, and her work as a psychiatrist, while her next major collection, *Folly and Grief* (2006), explores the traditions of the *Commedia dell'arte*, and contemporary street performance.

Harrison has been an active member of the Melbourne poetry community, convening the "Writers at the Water Rat" series of readings, and co-editing (with Phil Ilton) a subsequent anthology, *Said the Rat! Writers at the Water Rat! 2000-2002* (2003). With Sydney-based poet Kate Waterhouse, she edited an anthology of recent poetry about mothers and children, *Motherlode: Australian Women's Poetry 1986-2008* (2009). In 2010, Harrison published a collection of new and selected poems, *Columbine*.

Cabramatta

in myxomatotic crystal balls
farmers saw the flexing virus
of the universe exercise its fist
in a rabbit's eye gone white and blind

...beneath dusty gums, afternoons
on the porches, in the fields
of dumped rusty cars
culling dreams the dirt farmers dreamed

and where else could sydney go
but up through the beach-blue clouds
north to gosford, south to woollongong
or west across the rabbit lands?

travelling now for years
without arriving at the place you left
you can't arrive because it's gone
and possibly did not exist- and, so
adaptably, you take the new version
of the hume highway as it slices
towards cambelltown obliterating
the older road that twisted down
through the razorback hills
you drive away from a huge monocytic
sun setting somewhere behind you
but that's not what you see
you see the new-estates
young families have photocopied
from a jennings-billboard you see thickening inching brick

like a child seamlessly growing
like a child you notice has changed
only when you've been away
you notice how the suburbs have developed
breasts and muscles, pubic parks
a need to be themselves

bulldozers experiment upon the horizon
they have widened the road
to make it fast and safe but
from the cut hills a milky juice exudes
sugars, smoke, oil, caoutchouc
the bodily fluids of houses

part window, part tendon
automatic as the fairlane gears
life accelerates
you smell sydney
you smell it coming
its mirage oil swims on the tar

but this isn't how you remember it
now that the highway by-passes
everything that is ordinary
you see only the ordinary invisibility of speed
you are unsure which cows
are trees, which trees are people
the anabolic blur flattens the lot
until you are driving fast into your own history
and digging deep into the eye within
which is the only place you see it

somewhere out here, my grandfather's body
lies in the chaste dirt, beyond camden church
beyond hospital and mossy stone

shards of lorry-rubber litter the verge
and you're not sure whether that clump of gorse
which passed like a real thing was after all
the approximate place where your cousin's mazda
slipped like paper beneath a truck
the old adolescence was dangerous
but the new one stretches like laudanum smoothing
out the ruts and edges, taking from you what lies
buried in the hills — and how can a car resist
the road's scar, the dicotyledon, the system
of intercellular spaces opening to the atmosphere
committing the homology of bones and rabbits
to inconsequence — this road flattens
sterilises everything — an efficient
movement of cartilage, stretch of vocal cord
even the wind can't alter the pitch of its voice

I drive into liverpool past the pizza hut
that was my father's motor-bike shop
they say my mother rode side-car
and that I did, too, as a baby
born with scrambler mud in her blood
and a taste of leather in her bottle-milky mouth

I'm tougher than you
you're just a puss from pymble
a kelp-head from palm beach
it was that kind of racism followed
you along wakehurst parkway
mona vale rd to narrabeen surf club
where the rich boys used words like
what's the matter with you, westie
you frigid?

at bathurst races, side-car riders
screamed their shoulders across tar
their bodies sending up sparks

I saw a man decapitated by the guard-rail
and from the corner of my eye I watched
a bikie gang called the rats, each a silver-studded
dirty-jeaned, black-booted grizzly
gulping beer as they lounged over petrol tanks
like they were shiny young bulls

you had to be over fifty to belong to the rats
my father told me
it was about then he sold the shop
sick of bikers
who took out a norton
for a test run and never came back

in the photo: sandown, 1950
a young man's elemental mud
my father scrambling
in sepia style he lays the bike on its coccyx
it rears like a horse

a fibro history of cabramattan colloquialisms:
she'll be right mate; tom flipperies scrawl
across a toilet block's scarlet cape of brick

my grandmother serves tea on a plastic cloth

cousins grizzle their fairlanes
towards homebush for an unlawful drag
... the midnight track at brickies

and I'm driving
through the outskirts of sydney
numb as the best boyfriends

I met on the cb radio: it's King John here
calling for a copy
you flick I'll switch
go down Brother Butch...

vowel-static, it's a voice
you speak when your car's a burrow
in here you breed
inflamed around the eyes
going with the green
stopping with the red

thonged-foot flat to the floor
you blast the orange

your furry dice swing

like everything else, you
resemble bits of socialism
bits of like and as though you were down to earth
but mostly you made a meal of petrol
fumes multiplying
within the cul-de-sac
within the cul-de-sac

even though you've been to university
presently you'll sling a couple of girlfriends
across the front seat
attack the gears, the column shift
like a woman
you'll turn right or left
for the sake of the curb
follow your instinct, get lost
and argue with the navigator
who is also you — scrambler child
whose brave days are obsolete

petrol rivers
fume towards parramatta
pleistocene chimneys
smoke the sky-line: missus p missus a missus rra...

the traffic jams
same old factory spit! same old jail!

it's 1968 — an easter parade —
perhaps it's christmas —

each cardboard castle on wheels
is a huge green grassy america

bagpipes puff their cheeks
and strut ahead of the rsl mermaid
who, swathed in a mesh-metal suit
made of cola ring-top pulls
floats on a papier-mâché sea

espaliered children cheer

in two-four time bikes and chicks
grumble down main street six apace

missus p missus a missus rra
same old factory spit, same old jail!

around the corner comes a woman
on the prow of a ship, around the corner
comes miss parramatta; from poland; from
croatia; vietnamese, blonde

and, behind, the marching girls
in perfect step
trample the streamers and shake a little stick

you have nothing to say
except you loved the granville boys, their breath
like diesels, their hands slicking starships out of smoke

missus p missus a missus rra
missus m missus a missus tta
they could mousse you on the dance-floor
their crotches pressed to yours
they could stroke your hair
and you'd be hanging off the exhaust
their eyes looking right through you
as though you were the exhaust

every where you went
their virulence followed you
like a thrilling disastrous dare

the men I love still have perfect voice
a carburetter, idling to be lit
flicking to a rev-head beat:
go down Brother Butch
go down Brother Butch
go sweet

so you've cut your hair thinking
no one will recognise you
but your hair's always been unsure of itself
perms rained through
with grandmothers, pick-up-sticks, foam rollers
coloured purple like cabramatta on a hazy day

ceramic ducks fly by trifecta on the wall
the plastic roses smell of tripe
cigarettes bitch the gossipy air

*she married the strobe
he blew out the tyres of her eyes
next day she's back on the dance-floor
white teeth matching her underwear*

white knickers through white jeans
I've always liked dancing in a circle
with my girlfriends
you might say it's as close as you ever get
to the jungle

behind the wheel
you know where you are going
you confabulate yourself
into the fast/slow flow
of the city's irritable blood

you give the finger
cut the map off at the corner

and remember your aunt
pouring her accident compensation money
coin by coin into the poker's till...
something in the rhythmical pull —
the old-fashioned lever, hard
as a crucifix in her hand —
the queen of diamonds
the jack of clubs, the four tropical fruits in a row —
just like that other church where the chasuble
changes colour with the seasons — her fingers
dripped their habit in a plate

at the family reunion in lidcombe park

all the girls wear big hair and name tags
because we've bred like razorback rabbits
just like grandma taught us

even if we were to blame
we'd have another spin on the pokies
a jackpot, like a funeral, is talked about for days

you stand around in the sun —
you say which one is this, god he's grown —

even though you've been away eleven years
you were christened yesterday

and absent, again, beneath shadowy trees
you understand the wish

the wish to touch the root
which is the tree. All lies begin
with identity, confusion, clarity.

cars sit in the car-sale yards
along parra road like books
in a shiny store

and you know how the harbour
plumps up in the afternoons
touching the west with rabbits' breath

but, now, what of the future
and who do I love?

the minute I put a key
in the ignition
a word on a page
I feel the engine strip down...

remove the muffler
paint a sunset on the hood
switch on the radio

and the rhythm of your words
finds you pronouncing what you know:

it's King John here calling for a copy
you flick I'll switch
go down Brother Butch
go down Brother Butch
go sweet

I Am Most Happy

I am most happy watching the shape of the land.
The past begins at random, not planned.
I open my eyes. I'm stung with sand.
Love transcends our ability to understand.

The past begins at random, not planned.
I feel what is held grow smaller here.
Love transcends our ability to understand.
You are faceless my beach, disappear.

I feel what is held grow smaller — here
I reach for shadows, for fragments. Again
You are faceless my beach, disappear.
Shells have dreams, the familiar no name.

I reach for shadows, for fragments again.
We become whole when reflected upon and held.
Shells have dreams, the familiar no name.
This is the world. This is the world.

We become whole when reflected upon and held.
In the dark, I obey no command.
This is the world. This is the world.
I am most happy watching the shape of the land.

Size of the Tide

*Fevers confuse; lucidities break.
Cudmirrah plays hide and seek
with my mind. Now I remember
now I forget — this isn't a game
nor yet a death. Grandchildren
come out! Come out of the fire!
The plover is wintering here.
In the bays of my name, I
taste a river; slightly curved
at tip, I have borrowed a cliff.
I arrive September. Do you know
where I am? I am chasing
the flame which travels
the thought; I am chasing
the stone-coloured eggs of birth
through smaller, smaller sparks.
I can't speak of spheres, of worlds
I haven't seen, but I've seen the unseen
as it floods and spills
uncontained by the walls of sand
time has built around my tongue.
I've taught you to float.
I've taught you to fish from a wooden boat.
You've lassoed the air above my head
and cast your lines long —
but you can't make me wake
or make yourself known.
Memory
digs less for an accurate world
than for the fetch of the wave
and the tide which calls my name
most faintly inwards.*

When your heels dig deep in the bed
I see molluscs, pipis, hives in the sand.
I see the neap tide's quarter-moon
diminished, dry-boned as chalk.

I see fresh bait in your mind each dawn.
I see nets and gutting and food.
I see the shape of shells, the surnames of jetties
and the habits of South Coast birds.

I see you swivelling the edge of Cudmirrah:
stars, delicate colonies, filling the darkness
where your heels have left a hole.
I see the full moon, red as cinnabar

rise over Berrara point and carve
the rollocks of a quiet boat with quiet light.
When your heels dig deep in the bed
I see that pain has infinite memory.

I see you unable to comb your hair
the mudflats matted, empty, anywhere.
Adrift, I see your fingers plucking
as though at flowers on your skin.

*You won't find a vase to put love in.
Your riddles of salt can't choose
or change or decide my mind.
Don't tell me the world is content.*

*I'm sailing this dune through a dark-scarp
light, the only one of its kind.
Even now you can't see me
through the bars of this body, my shell.*

*It's careless how memory takes shape
falls apart — but see — the boats — coming
across the bar? Hurry. The men are coming home!
As if from war, not fishing.*

It's Late

It's late and I've come to the beach
to walk beneath the moon's rag.

A fisherman is walking home.
His rod dips and nods as though divining
treasure in the kelp-soured air.

Too old for games
he lands each step in another's
as though it is his mother's footprints

he follows, and by changing the shape of her trace
leaves his own life-line
scrawled across the sand's palm.

Now, the fisherman walks quickly
and then too slowly, as though unsure
of his destination, or of the silence
he lingeringly leaves.

Moss Wickum said
that every fisherman is unhappy with his catch
and most happy when he has caught nothing.

I have remembered this or else
I've constructed its truth
from nothing, myself.

Once I watched a diver bring abalone
to the surface
and cut them open until ten violet shells
reflected the sky —
then the fisherman (was it my brother?)
left the beach
the way a child leaves his mother or father

looking ahead
as ruined shells envelop the sea
and the light begins to dry over
all that will be abandoned differently.

JUDITH BEVERIDGE

b. 1956

Judith Beveridge was born in England in 1956 and migrated to Australia in 1960. She has published three books of poetry: *The Domesticity of Giraffes*, *Accidental Grace*, and more recently *Wolf Notes*. These three volumes have won Judith many of Australia's major poetry awards including the Dame Mary Gilmore Award, the NSW Premier's Award, the Victorian Premier's Award, the Judith Wright Calanthe Poetry Prize and the Josephine Ulrick Poetry Prize. Her poems have been translated into several languages. She currently teaches Creative Writing at Newcastle and Sydney Universities, and is poetry editor of *Meanjin*.

Central to Judith Beveridge's poetry is an ongoing, modest but profound spiritual quest that steps beyond the fracture lines of national or cultural boundaries and moves toward a rich humanist vision of community and commonality. Vested in a Buddhist sense of detachment and compassion, Beveridge's poetry is attuned to the daily circumstances of being, the minutiae of existence, uncovering ritual rather than simply habit, revealing meaning and fullness in each passing moment. Take for example the simple grace of one of Beveridge's early poems, 'Girl Swinging':

*A swing grinds on its chains.
A child sits pushing.
There's no eucalyptus,
atlas pine, or flowering ash,
no other child is calling
from the tender modulations of leaves:
just each note
of her ringing hear,
the feeling of being pushed
into the air.*

There is a seeming effortlessness to the reading of Beveridge's work, an ease that sets upon the reader thanks to the clarity and precision of voice and vision that she has delivered unerringly since her very first collection. Behind the poetry is an agile and flexible mind that seems to exist wholly within the body, within a full sense of being that does not allow for the mind, for the devilish trickeries and vagaries of language, to obscure the experience of either the poetry or the world that it presents. Equally, Beveridge's musicality is remarkable, absorbing and unfolding the cadences, the sonority and dissonance of being in the world, of each of her various subjects' differing *songs*, so that the reader is not simply given an image, but the slow evolution of a presence touching upon the various senses. From the musicality of 'To the Islands':

I will use the sound of wind and the splash of the cormorant diving and the music any boatman will hear in the running threads as they sing about leaving for the Islands.

I will use a sinker's zinc arpeggio as it rolls across a wooden jetty and the sound of crabs in the shifting gravel and the scrape of awls across the hulls of yachts.

*I will use the wash-board chorus of the sea and the boats and the skiffler's skirl
of tide-steered surf taken out by the wind through the cliffs.*

To the physicality of 'The Fisherman's Son':

*Perhaps it was when he first felt his shoulders roll an oar, or when he pulled the
thick boots on. Perhaps it was when he saw the curved thin rod of the moon angle
into his father's face and hook his mouth into an ugly grin*

Beveridge is one of Australia's most gifted poets of both the natural and the human world, often allowing the interconnection between these two realms to shine forth in moments of both praise and deep consciousness. She is both a spiritual (though not religious) poet and a poet of conscience. Her latest poetry, specifically the magnificent *Wolf Notes*, are hymns to the transient, the disempowered and the humble, that do not transform their subjects through a poetic gaze but communicate with simplicity and clarity the endless transformations of being and its underlying wonder. The poems presented here are but a small sample of a poet whose gentle and exacting touch and sure-poetic skills bear witness to a broad human vision capable of expressing and engendering compassion, insight and grace.

Occasions of Snails

1

They slide out of the light
leave a chrome stain through shade on the brickpath.
Their excreta is milled like censer ash
as they wander aisles, scented paths,
crawl over ageing grasses,
bask in warm mud like the terribly poor.
They wander the earth
as if looking for St Francis of Assisi.

2

So many anonymous buds —
a bucketful from the lettuces and roses.
The colour of autumn's loose litter —
they are aimless, evicted,
itinerant for the velvet luxury
of the orchid and lily.

3

The evening is cool, a cricket's call
fills the ground like a slow cistern.
I bend close to the earth, watch a tiny snail
rock in the crib of a leaf.
A trail just visible where spiders are tooling lace.
It works the abrupt edge.
It is a couturier cutting away.
It will quickly feather this leaf.

4

As a child I squinted for their script.
I searched the vast twin prayeryards
of sunshine and wind.
I watched for their headlines
as if they were notices for the arrivals
and departures of angels;
as if they were the proof —
beautiful and brief — of anonymous flights
scrawled across house-walls, down ditches,
on uncut grasses, on a splintery fence;
as if they were the tinsels of a local moon.

5

Now I am a gardener.
I make their landscapes deadly.
I make Golgothas in the garden.
And I have laid my poisons —
the mockery of diced stems.

6

I have pressed them to the earth.
I have trowelled them into the soil.
I have rivetted their pastel to the bricks.
I have denied them soft altars, plush roads,
these trackers of unattainable softness,
these evacuees of needle-thin tracks
who never look back on their painstaking silver.

7

But look how they go —
beseeching the deities Gloss
and Lightheadedness; how they stroll
amongst mucilage and essences
as if in mystical consortium
with nasturtium and rose —
how they find the sane bewilderment
of a child wandering her garden
with a rose in her head.
She curses her brothers
who drop them on cactuses,
turn them into sludge
and laugh them into sad weak bubbles.

Still, she remembers the hiss
of so many tossed into the ash.
Those winkled from their sockets by twigs.

8

Sometimes, when I hold them,
when they are immured
and smelling of lavender;
when they turn their dibbled heads
from my palms, I remember
those soldered paths
and this world's exotic itinerary.
Again, I track their rubbed passages
(to the roses, to the compost).
They have crawled into eggshells
as if into temples, as if into light.

The Domesticity of Giraffes

She languorously swings her tongue
like a black leather strap as she chews
and endlessly licks the wire for salt
blown in from the harbour.
Bruised-apple ed she ruminates
towards the tall buildings
she mistakes for a herd:
her gaze has the loneliness of smoke.

I think of her graceful on her plain—
one long-legged mile after another.
I see her head framed in a leafy bonnet
or balloon-bobbing in trees.
Her hide's a paved garden of orange
against wild bush. In the distance, running
she could be a big slim bird just before flight.

Here, a wire-cripple—
legs stark as telegraph poles
miles from anywhere.
She circles the pen, licks wire,
mimics a gum-chewing audience
in the stained underwear of her hide.
This shy Miss Marigold rolls out her tongue

like the neck of a dying bird.
I offer her the fresh salt of my hand
and her tongue rolls over it
in sensual agony, as it must
over the wire, hour after bitter hour.
Now, the bull indolently
lets down his penis like a pink gladiolus
drenching the concrete.

She thrusts her tongue under his rich stream
to get moisture for her thousandth chew.

The Kite

Today I watched a boy fly his kite.
It didn't crackle in the wind – but
gave out a barely perceptible hum.

At a certain height, I'd swear I heard
it sing. He could make it climb in
any wind; could crank those angles up,

make it veer with the precision of
an insect targeting a sting; then he'd
let it roil in rapturous finesse, a tiny

bird in mid-air courtship. When
lightning cracked across the cliff –
(like quick pale flicks of yak-hair

fly-whisks) – he stayed steady. For
so long he kept his arms up, as if
he knew he'd hoist that kite enough.

I asked if it was made of special silk,
if he used some particular string –
and what he'd heard while holding it.

He looked at me from a distance,
then asked about my alms bowl,
my robes, and about that for which

a monk lives. It was then I saw
I could tell him nothing in the cohort
wind, that didn't sound illusory.

How to Love Bats

Begin in a cave.
Listen to the floor boil with rodents, insects.
Weep for the pups that have fallen. Later,
you'll fly the narrow passages of those bones,
but for now —

open your mouth, out will fly names
like *Pipistrelle*, *Desmodus*, *Tadarida*. Then,
listen for a frequency
lower than the seep of water, higher
than an ice planet hibernating
beyond a glacier of Time.

Visit op shops. Hide in their closets.
Breathe in the scales and dust
of clothes left hanging. To the underwear
and to the crumbled black silks — well,
give them your imagination
and plenty of line, also a night of gentle wind.

By now your fingers should have
touched petals open. You should have been dreaming
each night of anthers and of giving
to their furred beauty
your nectar-loving tongue. But also,
your tongue should have been practising the cold
of a slippery, frog-filled pond.

Go down on your elbows and knees.
You'll need a spelunkologist's desire for rebirth
and a miner's paranoia of gases —
but try to find within yourself
the scent of a bat-loving flower.

Read books on pogroms. Never trust an owl.
Its face is the biography of propaganda.
Never trust a hawk. See its solutions
in the fur and bones of regurgitated pellets.

And have you considered the smoke
yet from a moving train? You can start
half an hour before sunset,
but make sure the journey is long, uninterrupted
and that you never discover
the faces of those Trans-Siberian exiles.

Spend time in the folds of curtains.

Seek out boarding-school cloakrooms.
Practise the gymnastics of web umbrellas.

Are you
floating yet, thought-light,
without a keel on your breastbone?
Then, meditate on your bones as piccolos,
on mastering the thermals
beyond the tremolo; reverberations
beyond the lexical.

Become adept
at describing the spectacles of the echo —
but don't watch dark clouds
passing across the moon. This may lead you
to fetishes and cults that worship false gods
by lapping up bowls of blood from a tomb.

Practise echo-locating aerodromes,
stamens. Send out rippling octaves
into the fossils of dank caves —
then edit these soundtracks
with a metronome of dripping rocks, heartbeats
and with a continuous, high-scaled wondering
about the evolution of your own mind.

But look, I must tell you — these instructions
are no manual. Months of practice
may still only win you appreciation
of the acoustical moth,
hatred of the hawk and owl. You may need

to observe further the floating black host
through the hills.

Woman and Child

They listen to the myna birds dicker in the grass.
The child's blue shoes are caked with
garden dirt. When he runs, she sees the antics
of a pair of wrens. She works the garden,

a pot of rusting gardenias has given off its ales
and infused the danker germinations of her
grief. She watches her son chase pigeons,
kick at the leaves piled high. Now, a magpie

adds to his cascades of laughter as he runs with
the hose, pours a fine spray, happy to be giving
to the grass this silver courtship. She sighs,
watches the drops settle in. Today, who

can explain the sadness she feels. Surely this
day is to be treasured: the sun out, the breeze
like a cat's tongue licking a moon of milk;
her son expending himself in small, public

bursts, happy among clover where bees hover,
and unfold centrefolds of nectar. Today,
who can explain the heaviness in her head, as if
all her worries were tomes toward a larger work,

one she knows she will never finish, but to which
she must keep adding, thought by thought.
She sweeps the petals, smells their russet imprint.
Soon dusk will come with an envoy of smoke

and her son outlast her patience by a rose.
Already he is tiring, pulling at the flowers.
It won't be long before they'll go in, listen
to the jug purr comfort. He'll sleep and she'll

lie back, or get up to unhook the cry of her cat
from the wire door. Now, a few cicadas are idling,
giving each other the gun and a cockatoo calls,
a haughty felon. She sighs, knowing she won't

escape her mood today, the turned earth
or its rank persuasions; her child's petulance
flaring like an orchid, or a cockatoo's unruly crest.
Today, she knows she will need to consider

her unhappiness, of what she is a prisoner – if not
the loss of hope's particulars. Her son soaks

the path, rinses the sky of its featureless blue.
He is giving that water, now, to everything.

The Fisherman's Son

Perhaps it was when he first felt his shoulders
roll an oar, or when he pulled the thick boots on.
Perhaps it was when he saw the curved thin rod
of the moon angle into his father's face and hook
his mouth into an ugly grin; or perhaps when
the sun rerouted his eyes to the necks of wading
birds along the shore as the first pink tones

of dusk uncurled along the ferns. It could have
been the way his father's knife eased out the eyes
of so many fish like spoonfuls of compote that gave
him thoughts black as the inky emulsions of squid,
a sleep no fishing boat could ease, nor star prick
with its comforting pin. Perhaps he learned nothing
from his father's face except how whiskey

trawled sleep from his eyes and left him pursued
by pain and thunder and a show of lightning's
yellow flares. Perhaps when he felt the rod
pull his arms through a reel's band of static,
when he heard his father's voice in the headache
scudding low across his forehead, the reel
with an insect's drum-head pitch his heart into

summer's mounting heat; the slow drip of days
revved up by outboards then dispelled by a drill
of mosquitoes, or weather finding tenor in its squalls.
Among stars and fish, those notes from the waste
hours he gutted, from the river's sweep of years,
who could know how many knives he heard
audition for his nerves, or what beat his heart

took, or how many rounds of an ingoing lake
before the wind rushed into the uncaulked
cracks and left him face-down, deep-drummed,
gear-slipped, deaf to his inner repertoire, blind
now to the river's weather-beaten stare.
Perhaps from a tangle of yellow air, or when
he heard the wind bale out of a speeding sky,

or a firetail add its flute to the rankling handle
of a windlass, a lyrebird weigh its call in
with an anchor's unrolling links, some twisting
erratic pull of tackle as the mosquitoes buzzed;
when he heard his father's voice in each dizzy
injected dose.... All day such talk went on
as the men brought in their hauls, gutting fish

to the noise of pelicans, those bills clacking
like clapperboards, the ease of routine. Here
among the brace of tides, as wind skips along
ropes left lank and loose and dangling now
among the sloops, no one fully knowing why
a boy would desire to die....The avocets walking
the shore with their hesitant, hair-splitting steps.

To The Islands

I will use the sound of wind and the splash
of the cormorant diving and the music
any boatman will hear in the running threads
as they sing about leaving for the Islands.

I will use a sinker's zinc arpeggio as it
rolls across a wooden jetty and the sound
of crabs in the shifting gravel and the scrape
of awls across the hulls of yachts.

I will use the wash-board chorus of the sea
and the boats and the skiffler's skirl
of tide-steered surf taken out by the wind
through the cliffs. Look—I don't know

much about how to reach the Islands, only
what I've heard from the boatman's song
and from a man who walked the headland
to find a place in the rocks free of salt

and osprey. But perhaps I can use
the bladder-wrack and barnacle, the gull
wafting above the mussels and the bird
diving back to sea. Perhaps I can use

the song sponge divers sing to time each dive
and then use their gasps as they lift
their bags onto the skiffs. Perhaps
the seapool whispers of the sun-downers

or the terns above the harbour are what
the divers sing to as they hold their
breath and swim the silent minutes through
with prayer. I will use the gull's height

and the limpet's splash and the wasps' nest
hanging like a paper lamp under the pier
and the little boat sailing out. Even the
fishermen lugging shoals over the stones,

even the sailors shift-walking the decks,
even the end-blown note of a shell leveled
towards the horizon. I will use the eagle's
flight moored in the eyes of children

and the voices of men, the ones, they say,
who've made it, though perhaps the purlin

creaking on its rafter, the gull squawking
from the jetty, the wind calling

along the moorings and the notes the divers
hear in the quiet waters of their breathing
as they seek release through depths
are all *I'll*, know about finding the Islands.

Meanwhile, I'll use the sound of sunlight
filling the sponges and a diver's saturated
breathing in the lungs of an oarsman
rowing weightless cargo over the reefs.

On an Evening in Late Summer

I want the bird with the key-maker's drill,
the chime-maker's hammer, the bird that sounds
as if a child with a piece of larchwood
hit icicles off a grille. And the man who comes

to sweep leaves from his gate, who feels
the shadows amass across his face the way
blowflies convene and scatter over the plums —
I want for him a sunshaft wide as a sombrero,

one he could nap under beside a stream
and a wild chrysanthemum. I want to put
my fingertip in the eccentricities of a web
a spider has darned in the Christmas bush

and free a fly from its orbit. I want to be
taken where the sun puts the scarlet note of
poinsettias into the depth of a quince-coloured
sky, where the fringed wings of the thrips

and the ephemeral beetles of this February night
go on in the mind of a child who finds,
in the honeysuckle and in the mayapple, a choir
loud enough to make her hum her desires.

I want to watch from the secularised regions
of the juniper a praying mantis step out
and tremble on anorexic legs as if it searched
for the chords of any diminishing number.

a psalmist trying to sustain a rhapsody
for Betelgeuse and the moon. What I want
is for the night to shake loose and whirr and dance
like a chanteuse of the treetops, like the bees

and the wasps drunk amongst the passion flowers
as if they were the ends of bows zipping
across strings in a concerto; then, over
the compost and the roses — in études about

life versus decrepitude. I want the wind
to rustle the buds of the lavender and birds
to tin-talk with the rain and the fall of summer
fruit. I want the wind to call like a Mexican

in his dreams the name *esperance*, *esperance* as
it blows across the uncut grass. And as I drag

my bench across the porch tiles this time of day,
weighty with the calls of cockatoos as it is

with the perfume of the gardenia. I want the fly
to turn the world on the turn-stiles of its eyes,
I want a girl to turn plums in her hands,
each a magenta sun, and never need to wonder

how far anything is from a peer or a rival
while she hums her desires into the lobed leaves
and scarlet bracts of the poinsettias, her finger
still sealed in the strings of an immaculate design.

Wind

The last of the day
is burning off in streets.
Far off, those trees churning lightly
as smoke behind
shut windows, doors.

Scrap-paper wind blows down
all the long street
broken up into
bits of rainwater—
these houses lustreless,

thin as lebanese bread.
The day is cooling.
The air feels as if it is
filling with water;
it's only the wind.

Trees churning at the window.
Bits of the day
badly pegged along
the skyline
as washing flaps along

back-fences.
The wind is the sound
of pills dissolving in trees
or a radio channel gone
off the air—

here, where it catches the high wires
it's like someone's far-off
humming in all
the pouring water
of its branches.

At The End Of The Day

The sun is westering. Shadows litter
the streets. Now that the heat is gone,
the air's expressionless. I search its
blank face for signs or recognition,

but the sun fading from the day
is like backing fading from the mirror.
The day lifts its touch
and my senses lose their assurance.

There is no comfort now in the city
that's pulling apart, or the people
whose eyes change like dice.
I watch the landscape withdraw and recede

leaving me to consider the silence
through which I move.
The images are gone. I become
just a breath mark across dark glass.

GIG RYAN

b. 1956

Gig Ryan was born Elizabeth Anna Martina Ryan in Leicester, England, in 1956, the fourth of ten children of Peter and Margery Ryan. The family had moved to England so that Peter Ryan could qualify as a surgeon, and they returned to Australia in 1957, settling in Melbourne. Educated at Catholic schools in Melbourne, Ryan became interested in literature, music and the arts at a young age. In 1974, at seventeen, she won a Victorian poetry prize, and published her first poems shortly thereafter. After school she enrolled in an Arts degree at La Trobe University, supporting herself with a variety of casual jobs. In 1974, she helped found a feminist literary journal, *Luna*, which she co-edited with others (including Barbara Giles) until 1978. As well as writing poetry, Ryan remained interested in music, and as a singer/songwriter performed in Melbourne bars and cafes.

At the end of 1978, Ryan moved to Sydney, where she pursued her interest in music, studying musical theory and forming a three-piece band Disband with two other women. She continued to write poetry and, at the end of 1980, published her first collection *The Division of Anger*. While some critics responded negatively to the intensity and formal looseness of her poems, others were more positive, and the collection was joint-winner of the Anne Elder award in 1981. Ryan has since published six further poetry collections, including *Pure and Applied*, winner of the C. J. Dennis award in 1999. Returning to Melbourne in 1990, Ryan completed her B.A. (majoring in classical languages) in 1993, and continued to perform and record with the band Driving Past. She has been active as a critic and freelance book reviewer, particularly of poetry, and since 2001 she has been poetry editor for *The Age*. Her poetry is noted for its satirical edge and sharp observations on social mores, and idiosyncratic use of language.

Abrupt, pared-back, given to juxtapositions that reshape the urban world her poetry evokes with satirical insight and a dry wicked humour, Ryan's poetry is no easy thing.

There is an inwardness to Ryan's work, somewhere between revelry and a caustic self-regard, that peels back the subject while also peeling back the accretions of language and culture that form the subject. She couples the vernacular of the urban with a fitful journey through Western myths, consumer culture and references to a suburban world that often appears as an underworld, an emaciated hell (see 'Interest Rates' and the grimly funny 'Global Rewards Redemption Centre'). Middle-class preoccupations – interest rates, mortgage, the kids – provide a backdrop, if not target, for a poetry not given to mercy or vain sentimentality.

Along the razor of its depiction of inner-city life, there is a mournfulness, both bleak and filled with honest emotion, in much of Ryan's work. More the demotic of a dystopia than the vernacular of a republic, Ryan's use of language – its truncation, tautness and drama – cuts equally across the body politic and the scene of poetry. Throughout all of this, her humour, insight and tight music both test and engage the reader. She gives street-learning a classical voice; post-modernism, experience.

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Dawn

Drugs shatter on the mirror
the methodical blade
weighing up her with what I don't feel
Her hands bleeding periodically like a knife
Blood leaps in my arms hurtling into death
The Americans throw out their profitless grain
their churches make us cry
You get your introverted cancer
and I get nauseous at everything I look at
your sunken head, I mean,
careless and satisfied
Dawn grazes the earth like a razor

Dawn's wet blue and white tips down the sheer blank buildings
Birds sing like ships washing up on the grey coast
His voice goes off quietly in my head like a grenade
except it isn't. He preserves himself shrewdly
in her cap of vitamins. A soft spool tampers around him
I wave to the incubators. Goodbye, suckers
brewing in your atavistic jam. I wrench the web.
An ambulance wails like a metal plate.

1965

The river winding red and green with corpses
She told me
They stood them on the banks
and shot them
anyone vaguely suspected of associating with, belonging to,
sympathizing with, the PKI
the largest communist party in a non-communist country
in the world
in Indonesia in 1965
The useless President, blinded and blinded,
shot, in another way
The false counter-plot making the original lie
seem true
Blood and rotting, you could smell it
she told me, crying, rivery
out of earshot
We keep the books, the names, hope
in our heads
The blocked rivers trailing like glaciers
The army's fear like a slowworm
eating away at my parents, my sisters, my brothers
We could've been voted in
The millions of Opposition glues powerlessly together
This President? Tin.
Crying
out of earshot
The thick rivers. We parcel in our heads.
Whispering.
in Indonesia in 1965

January

January is tearless as shampoo, entertaining and marketable.
She wraps her hair up, worthlessly.
While here, having survived Hiroshima, a cockroach sits,
smaller than a policeman's heart.
For the pain, she says, pointing at it,
as her limp eyes stare and wander,
scuffles the sheet under her chin, and worries like a tablet.

And that young man. His eyes
romantic as aluminium strewn against a sea-wall.
Everyone had to get back. I did,
feeling like a euphemism, and inexplicable.
Everyone explains too much, as the collision of your 'soul'
is gradually moved away. The mad boys laugh
backwards like clouds. Her voice arrests you.
I only want it for the crossword, she says.

The convalescent door raps weakly.
They're selling graceless things,
as the gelati van tinkles past, its lurid music
swerves perspective over. Nothing I need.
The sky pulls into view like a monument.
You declare yourself invalid, but just.
As god comes up on the radar.

Autumn

You go to bed a failure and rise a saint
The casino's trays of lights wobble in the river
Unpack the origami news in prison flats
and books advertised like cars
TV tracks the angst-ridden comedian's path
I forget who I am, and drive
or hover at a desk, a blank mosaic
while their shocks comfort and defer
She retires to her studio
with her devices and rueful catharsis
Dust words blow away
The time you waste
murky and naive, the plinking church organ
and sweet liturgy pouring on the air
A beautiful object covers his book
Concrete rain falls down.

The Buddha Speaks

I have reached Nirvana. I have no desires.
I don't want to see you dead anymore, or alive.
This broad uninhabited plateau is heavenly, really.
I have eliminated the possibility of pain.
The slopes are crawling with pain.
Any movement, after all, is futile,
so I have cut down on aid generally
and talked myself out of violent feelings,
like a dense disciple not listening, or worse,
sweeping up everything you say and carefully
sweeping it into his mouth's dump, the words that is.
Those who ask are fools to begin with
so I let my wisdom come out, illustrating it
with little pictures, and my sayings touch those only
who are truly alert. The fools go away no wiser
with their lists and prayers. And my body sits quietly,
emptied of passions.

Night and Day

Trite yearning expels its medals
Mortal sins hold me in their frame which shrinks me
It was nice, then you run in chains
ultimate compromise
You can sit for hours and listen to his clothes
He scoffs at my art. I freeze at home.
In another flat, he sips his dose
and scratches out silence
Wind climbs the traffic stars
the city's trim horror you praise like a servant
noises folding distance
I press my hands to the gas bill

Soft voices impale
He tells of his achievements
and 'confirms' your existence
in his parliament
Funeral birds break
the sky's white mortar
pouring down its tremors. Parks drip,
the sliding cars despair should rake.

Sunset

Sunset's twining birds call from the good roofs
along the hill's steps where blocks of flats
rise into the sky
Flame windows ripple and draw, night gently bows and claps
each knitted cloud's acts, plots, kisses, legends

All remnant and perusal
Traffic withers in the street on the quiet public holiday

Rubbish trucks ponderously clear and absolve the streets
the white moon the towers of honeyed flats
that wind with the river along banks of needle trees
Police surveillance slaps across the sky
Swift cars return Sounds chisel the streets from darkness
Voices chime and follow as they close the flats at night.

Saturday

Saturday nights I stay home
having given up love's ghosts no money stuffs and seals
The plastic hurdles of my life never get unpacked
The Stealth planes crash undetected in the Nevada desert
My surrogate brother says goodbye at the wailing platform
You tried every nowhere drug there is
I never see him again
The city closes up
His train blows into the sunset
I blow my memories out amongst the trees
the scabby house, the lot
The kid whistled through the door with a slab of beer
You marry the obedient water's thin flames, yachts,
until desires leave and labours end.

Some Sunday

Yachts, and a lunch of phoney memories
keep the chemicals in business,
you reach down to second words, saying what's gone
like the leftovers he keeps greasing in the fridge.
The youngest is sick after. You can take just so much
of raw spinach, his subscribed brainwave
doesn't glow from here. To a cockroach
the room would look smaller, but to me
or your spontaneous friends there's never enough of it.

The couple next to me think the photography's wonderful
and giggle through the words and the silence.
They eat the screen's colourful slab, and have found
something to do with the night. It stared like an awkward wall
in a luxury flat.

An element of pity creeps into your wet relationship.
You kill yourself with laughing, the fake spot
where we met vanishes frankly.
We haven't died. You re-arrange the room,
but a trendy pointing bone
is in that laugh. The depressed American
wants quiet and protein.
Nothing is ever internal enough.

Interest Rates

1.

“I used to be like you, full of icy self-regard
but life monotonously catches up and culls you
and all the others’ Things begin to glow
like your own house, car, and love’s equivalent
You get sick of being alone and raddled, and he’s a real pet
. . . isn’t he? So I buckled under, got a richly job
and I’m, you know, fulfilled. Before it was just a covey of unrealistic aims
Everybody told me.
He dusted me off
who had once been lost
Now it’s solid, tangible
The baby’s like cement to me
Otherwise the million things I wanted every cider brick
I’d just be drifting or immersed”

2.

“You can score easily in Thailand
but the stuff’s no def for me”
Her drugged voice matinees and peels
She parks the dryer and puts the sixth gin down
after two pre-spiritualism weeks
“There I can withdraw from this chemical western mew
Drugs and alcohol and sex rivet you in place
but in the East they starve and grow, I mean spiritually
They have truth and peace and death and acceptance”
The god advertisements sheep in between the sitcoms
and the Government making strikes illegal
She looks at the cleaner stove
“Europe was a blast but this’s cheaper”

3.

The artist observes her attitude
and her observation equals the product
which we can’t get Personality’s enough
Her head knocks in its shell
“I mean, you’re not a bimbo” he says, profoundly
“and for the last two hours on Ecstasy I thought yeah
right She’s/It’s got to be” she listens through the beer stool
through his petulance to Adeva’s geometry and slings
His bones and crystals jump and prig the laser stairs
He would be at it with its ghosts of peace
and Truth roaming empty and haranguing
her supple rhododendron mantra’s steel jailed corridors
The console shards “I mean, I was majorly transformed”
insight levies Each pringle of expense continues
its buffet-car of depth’s serene atlas joy

The greasy boards and lights and mortgage
dull the disc.

Pure and Applied

1.

The channel caves in his hand like a weak cushion
as news reads the screen
and curved along its poverty, a reflecting and equivalent desert
occupies geometry
which devalues each tincture my chatelaine
which people vacancy
like today's harping and the litmus of his hair

2.

Politicians nod like priests
You slip in the crowded chair like 3 million others
TV shows you
The rest is dreck, a slump
You surrender to his embalming pill
his glorious forgotten blackout kiss and nest
The walls' diagrams arrowing to a former heaven peter in the mind
Monotonous branches scratch the ditchy air
I had to look at 800 dollars
but death precedes me entering like worthlessness

3. (the good weekend)

Ten pages on a headache A world satisfied by charisma
The corner shop's dim globes the newspaper's parting atoms
but death can be "egotistical, manipulative", his claim and corona
Her burying mother acridly grinds into the present
An article probes the shops, the ultras
in the sad dark regions and recesses of his relation

The sheets wind milky green
and then a big blue sky's supposed to incize
putting you in the right counsel
I watch his weakness strive and shut
as theory wades, but on practice it's a klutz
I protect him from ardour
Here, in this propensity, this rust
My paraphernalia crash in a junction of boredom

4.

Automatically he'd be a lump
The light's suicide split craving beneath the wax door
Piano tinkles over the woolknit-lounge ad, his thoughts
that mirror a wreath of gloss abrupt pages
perspex and disheartened and foam
dead desire
and he uncrumples from the black lacquer

5. (sum)

“It bores me severely
Everything you say is thrashed into a refrained verdict
numbfully secure at its post
The car's underwater the doorkey starts
and recedes like a gun, excellently
and never loved. Obstruct, by all means, any silent rack or behest
Anyway, it was major which you blasted, a real user

He was glamourized, delta'd, totally miami'd
like a shoot-out, you know, head above water
His blue hair shining like rockets
Dance-a-rama *I'll* say, you should've seen the gronks
they turned away in squadrons, rapturously
to the new spasmic floor. I could've killed
but I dropped stuff instead
and was, subsequently, messed for any social, being severely zomboid
Last night: what a crack”.

If I Had a Gun

I'd shoot the man who pulled up slowly in his hot car this morning
I'd shoot the man who whistled from his balcony
I'd shoot the man with things dangling over his creepy chest
in the park when I was contemplating the universe
I'd shoot the man who can't look me in the eye
who stares at my boobs when we're talking
who rips me off in the milk-bar and smiles his wet purple smile
who comments on my clothes. I'm not a fucking painting
that needs to be told what it looks like.
who tells me where to put my hands, who wrenches me into position
like a meccano-set, who drags you round like a war
I'd shoot the man who couldn't live without me
I'd shoot the man who thinks it's his turn to be pretty
flashing his skin passively like something I've got
to step into, the man who says *John's a chemistry Phd*
and an ace cricketer, Jane's got rotten legs
who thinks I'm wearing perfume for him
who says *Baby you can really drive* like it's so complicated,
male, his fucking highway, who says *ah but you're like that*
and pats you on the head, who kisses you at the party because
everybody does it, who shoves it up like a nail
I'd shoot the man who can't look after himself
who comes to me for wisdom
who's witty with his mates about heavy things
that wouldn't interest you, who keeps a little time
to be human and tells me, female, his ridiculous
private thoughts. Who sits up in his moderate bed
and says *Was that good* like a menu
who hangs onto you sloppy and thick as a carpet
I'd shoot the man last night who said *Smile honey*
don't look so glum with money swearing from his jacket
and a 3-course meal he prods lazily
who tells me his problems: his girlfriend, his mother,
his wife, his daughter, his sister, his lover
because women will listen to that sort of rubbish
Women are full of compassion and have soft soggy hearts
you can throw up in and no-one'll notice
and they won't complain. I'd shoot the man
who thinks he can look like an excavation-site
but you can't, who thinks what you look like's for him
to appraise, to sit back, to talk his intelligent way.
I've got eyes in my fucking head. who thinks if he's smart
he'll get it in. I'd shoot the man who said
Andrew's dedicated and works hard, Julia's ruthlessly ambitious
who says *I'll introduce you to the ones who know*
with their inert alcoholic eyes
that'll get by, sad, savage, and civilised

who say *you can* like there's a law against it
I'd shoot the man who goes stupid
in his puny abstract how-could-I-refuse-she-needed-me
taking her tatty head in his neutral arms like a pope
I'd shoot the man who pulled up at the lights
who rolled his face articulate as an asylum
and revved the engine, who says *you're paranoid*
with his educated born-to-it calm
who's standing there wasted as a rifle
and explains the world to me. I'd shoot the man who says
Relax honey come and kiss my valium-mouth blue.

Let's Get Metaphysical

It's party-time in Darlington, but he's sick of hairstyles
and those oracles of fun you give away like nuts.
Here it's raining in the kitchen, his black eyes glimpse virtue.
We hide friends under the bed
and can't get out of the room, stifling and affectionate.
How can you dance with your sprained ankle?
But you can't step back and separate the object from the process.
This thing is beyond love, beyond the brain's split.
The walls are singing with blue love
and the yellow sky dances with me
on days like this.

Enlightenment can't last, its silent smiling adventure.
I thought there was more to you.
The telephone is hot metaphysically
but his material presence is the limit.
What are you doing for lunch? I'm starting a charity until it stops
or else I'm giving it to you. The city like a map
isn't spontaneous. Listen to the lift's electric bell
as people freely pour out, and your free hour
wiggles to the window and jumps.
I don't like it when his body talks.

The Global Rewards Redemption Centre

1.

I heal the ramparts of the deponent tense
I am being loved and certain
A toast to the surgeon's art who cut me
from her skin
the night's software: a drink

I continue my existence as a negative role-model
bathing in the blood of others
sitting in a cone of noise

Birds sing me to sleep at dawn
when you walk in the fabulous cold.

2.

across remnants of life
The spiritualist junkies examine their dreams
Nice days pass my window like a train
You follow him into the baptistery or chancellery
a guide for each muted circle
The city's crumbling brocade and souvenir
immortal art
Aluminium pillars shimmer in the bank's foyer
Sail towards the coast
Await the unpassable sorrow

Mary Wollstonecraft

1.

“Now the teachers bore me
He passes, with his fallen interests
preaching what benefits, softened tyrant
He talks over my life
like a plane overhead
a different current
I thought I was fated but I was not
Drenched river”
Stranger to doubt, she splashes
“The fat ex tussling his portfolio beseeched whispers
Garments slink
and failure washed away
He unloves me”

2.

“Sister I took from him
but languished governess . . .

Now I thread hands through sea
on this rocked shore, and flag your business
as food clips and fearful maid scratches
Your child also hecks and ails
Torrents block us and the awning water and silence knives”
She writes in a feast

3.

“We found more sure
our time spilled together
who could not know this last
I leave you what’s living, loved and better,
though the changed doctors undo”
and arrow freezes

Kings Cross Pastoral

When she remembers every chumpy thing
The baby weather hurts her, the sick sun
At home a dead blind flaps from its joint
She goes on,
like it's the latest reason or excuse
and hibernates with pity's taxied screen around her
I could cop it if it worked
She jilts the door, roneo'd with debts
Thought protects you from the street's chattels
The sky passes like a stick

A regular tip his crinkled rites of love
Joy cracks itself laughing
and with these crimes I shut the door
having gone off pity
The heart's anchor's dust now when he shows up
harmless, dishonest, recent
A car is better than a tree
Voices fall on the city's spine and crack

In The Purple Bar

She spreads her pale legs
out across the table
and the beer
while he, the last car accident
red and tight across his eyes,
sucks her off, ungracefully.
But is she happy?

The hotel continues,
those expensive drinks. You were late.

He's playing Billie Holiday
unshaven, but careful.
Let's get things straight.
He buys you a cheap gin
and you want / want / want

How resilient you are.

She kisses the man, his mouth smells
of another woman's cunt.
But nothing gets to you.

How well we cope.

Iphigenia

Ships slinged in low elastic waters knock
who chug you to the altar
where old blood crumbles.
Orange fire tassels air.
You look out from the coast

back when twisting horses rise...
and clay figurines scout on your shelves
or back, lost geraniums shimmered August
and then expunge, then 'fluey tenants later, then tied between two screens
your binary presence more real than soft dawn
when ritual tatters
and reversible names converse over the galloping maps.

Her teary pillar shrives a velour sea.
Your hair tacked with daphne and myrtle. Birds creak, a charmer—
nett bridegroom, mock stag—
to keeling ships, to dimple wind
coins close your eyes

2011

ROBERT FORSTER

b. 1957

Robert Forster (born 29 June 1957) is an Australian singer-songwriter, best known for his work with songwriting partner Grant McLennan, with whom he co-founded The Go-Betweens.

Forster grew up in Brisbane, Australia attending Brisbane Grammar School. He met McLennan in drama classes at the University of Queensland and, inspired by a mutual love of Bob Dylan and the New York music scene, formed the Go-Betweens.

The Go-Betweens were perhaps the quintessential cult band of the '80s: they came from an exotic locale (Brisbane, Australia), moved to a major recording center (in their case, London) in a sustained bid to make a career out of music, released album after album of music seemingly tailor-made for the radio in spite of their having little use for contemporary Top 40 musical/lyrical formulas, and earned considerable critical praise and a small but fervent international fan base. Although The Go-Betweens were absent throughout the '90s before re-forming in the new millennium, both of the band's songwriters embarked on respectable solo careers in the interim and, while rarely reaching the heights The Go-Betweens scaled, they still managed to uphold the group's legacy.

Robert Forster and Grant McLennan began as a pair of teenagers obsessed with the earthy rock of Dylan, CCR, and the Velvet Underground and encouraged by the Australian punk of the Saints. As collected on *The Able Label Singles*, their first two singles show a fondness for scruffy, British Invasion/new wave-influenced pop/rock. Picking up permanent drummer Lindy Morrison, they recorded their debut LP, moved to England, and signed a short-lived deal with Rough Trade. Going for a lush, tuneful sound crammed with nonstandard rock instrumentation, they went on to record five more excellent LPs. Though their pre-Beggars Banquet albums were traditionally hard to find in the States, that label finally reissued all six albums on CD in 1996.

In 2000 the band reunited and released a new album, *The Friends of Rachel Worth*, which also featured all three members of Sleater-Kinney. It wasn't just a fluke, as the band recorded follow-up albums released in 2003 (*Bright Yellow Bright Orange*) and 2005 (*Oceans Apart*). Documenting a 2005 concert in their hometown, the DVD/CD package *That Striped Sunlight Sound* arrived in early 2006, just a few months before the death of McLennan in May.

In addition to his work with the Go-Betweens, Robert Forster has released five solo albums: *Danger in the Past*, recorded in Berlin in 1990; *Calling from a Country Phone*, recorded at Sunshine Studios, Brisbane, in 1993 with members of local pop group Custard; *I Had a New York Girlfriend*, a collection of cover versions recorded in Melbourne in 1994; *Warm Nights*, recorded in London in 1996 and produced by Edwyn Collins; and *The Evangelist*, recorded (all but one track - "A Place to Hide Away") at Good Luck Studios, London, September - November 2007 with longtime collaborators Adele Pickvance and Glenn Thompson.

Critically acclaimed internationally as a songwriter, he reveals a strong literary influence in his work. Through his work with McLennan and the Go-Betweens, he is one of a group of Brisbane musicians who established a particular Brisbane sound characterised by laid-back, jangly arrangements.

In 2005, Forster began writing for the Australian magazine, *The Monthly*. He had virtually no print experience, with only a column on hair care for a fanzine in the 1980s to his credit. On 25 October 2006, it was announced that Forster was the winner of the Pascall Prize for Critical Writing for his columns.

On 6 May 2006, Grant McLennan died in his sleep at his home in Brisbane. Forster picked three songs co-written by Grant McLennan, including "Demon Days", which is the last song the pair wrote together, and recorded them alongside some of his own material to produce his first album in 11 years. *The Evangelist* was released on April 26, 2008 through Yep Roc Records.

Forster announced his return to live performance with four nights at the Queensland Music Festival in July 2007.

Hold Your Horses

Under blue skies,
Under your eyes,
Under clouds so dark they make you cry,
I see red boats,
I see grey cars,
I hear sounds so white
they could be stars.
Under blue skies,
Under your eyes,
Under a sun so hot it makes you cry,
I see red boats,
I see grey cars,
I hear sounds so white
they could be stars.
It's not blue,
It's not sky,
It's just me
Wanting rain.

The Clarke Sisters

They had problems with their father's law,
They sleep in the back of a feminist bookstore,
The Clarke Sisters.
The eldest sister keeps a midnight vigil,
The youngest sister she's not spiritual,
The Clarke Sisters.
Their steel grey hair, their lovely steel grey hair,
The Clarke Sisters.

Why don't I introduce you,
I'm sure they won't mind.
But don't you dare laugh at their collections
Handed down, handed down for love.

The middle sister gets her period blood,
The flood of love, the flood of love,
The Clarke Sisters.
Their steel grey hair, their lovely steel grey hair,
The Clarke Sisters.

The afternoon world, the bees have stung the softball girls.
The midnight world, the crystal ball down the wooden hall,
The treehouse stands, their early childhoods were treehouse plans,
And right above,
The Clarke Sisters, handed down to love,
Handed down to love, handed down to love!

Clouds

The clouds are here,
They aren't up in the sky.
I cupped them with my hands
and reached up high.

I said to these clouds
"No more am I blind;
I have to see straight, and that will make me unkind."

Visions of blue,
I'm angry, I'm wise.
And you, you're under cloudy skies.

Blue air I crave, blue air I breathe.
They once chopped my heart the way you chop a tree.
Told to equate achievement with pain,
I took their top prize and paid them back with rain.

Visions of blue,
I'm angry, I'm wise, and you,
You're under cloudy skies.

Blue air I crave, blue air I breathe.
They once chopped my heart the way you chop a tree.
Told to equate achievement with pain,
I stole their top prize and paid them back with rain.

Visions of blue, I'm angry, I'm wise, and you,
You're under cloudy skies.
Visions of blue, perverse and strong, and you,
You're under cloudy skies.
What I did once I now do everyday.

He Lives My Life

He's got a four wheel drive that he takes to Double Island Point,
He's got a relationship with a woman that he met in an Irish joint.

I know the land
And the coloured sand,
Everything's fresh at the source in this land,
Everything's fresh at the source in this land.

And I wish him luck,
I hope he gets it right
As he lives my live!

He's got a house all to himself that overlooks a park,
He's got a piano all to himself that he plays after dark.
I know the sound
As the sun goes down,
Everything's fresh at the source as the sun goes down,
Everything's fresh at the source as the sun goes down!

And I wish him luck
I hope he gets it right,
As he lives my life!

And if you see him
Tell him I'll be him
As I live his life!

Darlinghurst Nights

I opened a notebook, it read "The Darlinghurst Years".
I snapped it shut but out jumped some tears.
I didn't have to read it, it all came back,
Dragging my fingers through my hair,
Hidding behind her back.

Gut rot cappuccino, gut rot spaghetti,
Gut rot rock'n'roll through the eyes of Frank Brunetti,
And always the traffic, always the lights,
Joe played the cello through those
Darlinghurst Nights.

One more coffee and I must go
Back to my room, more chapters to go.
We'll meet up in an alley with more places I know.

I'm going to change my appearance everyday,
I'm going to write a movie and then I'm going to star in a play,
I'm going to go to Caracas because you know I'm just going to have to get
away.

Marjorie and Kim, Andy and Clint, Debbie, Bertie, people came and went,
And then there was Suzie who we never ever saw again.

And always the traffic always the lights,
Climbing that hill star studded nights,
Joe played the cello,
Alright.

A True Hipster: Remembering Grant McLennan

On 6 May, on a Saturday afternoon while preparing a housewarming party, Grant McLennan, a friend and working partner of mine for 30 years, died of a heart attack. He was 48 years old. This is a remembrance.

Grant and I started the Brisbane band The Go-Betweens in January 1978. We'd met two years earlier in the drama department at the University of Queensland, where we were both doing Bachelor of Arts degrees centred mainly on English literature. Most of the drama subjects were taught at a small off-campus theatre called the Avalon. It was a jostling atmosphere in which Grant and I felt immediately at home, and our friendship began and blossomed here, amid the costume trunks, the works of Beckett, Genet and Ionesco (perfect for a pop band), and a genial professor, an Englishman by the name of Harry Garlick. It was action, and fun, and good learning, and it's where The Go-Betweens started.

Grant was a whiz-kid when I first met him. His passion was film. He was either going to be a director or the greatest film critic this country had ever seen. At 18, he was writing reviews for a publication called *Cinema Papers*, while working at the Schonell, the campus cinema where he assisted with the programming. At 19, he'd done his BA. It was as if he'd raced so hard, and with such brilliance, that he'd got slightly ahead of himself. His application for the film and television school in Sydney was turned down on the grounds that he was too young. Which is where I came in, to fill a gap that was to be merely a year or two, before further adventures took us elsewhere.

While Grant had been pouring himself into film, I'd been falling into music. My academic record at university was patchy beside his. I never finished the degree. The electric guitar and stirrings overseas sighted in the music press were starting to consume me. Grant knew I had a band with a university friend and a drummer, and this intrigued him. The band, which went under two names, The Mosquitoes (taken from *Gilligan's Island*) and The Godots (from Beckett), only did three shows over two years, of which Grant saw the last two. At the final show, we played the first good song I thought I'd written. It was called 'Karen'.

The similarities between us were strong. We were both private-school boys who'd done well academically but come out of the system with no idea of a career. We were both looking for something that bohemian-free Brisbane couldn't offer, except in the traditional safety of an Arts degree. And we were both uneasy and difficult, having emerged from families who looked on somewhat bewildered at the eldest sons they had produced. When Grant and I met, we didn't know it but we'd found each other. Rough mirror-images. And when the friendship that had begun in classes grew to the point where I visited his house and saw his bedroom stacked with film books, novels and posters, I realised his "thing", film, wasn't just an enthusiasm; it was an obsession. And I knew that was exactly how I felt about music.

We began a slow exchange. He told me about French new wave cinema and film noir. I told him about the greatness of the Velvet Underground. He told me about auteur theory and the genius of Preston Sturges. I told him about Dylan in the mid-'60s. He mentioned Godard and Truffaut. We became Godard and Truffaut. Brisbane didn't know it at the time, but there were two 19-year-olds driving around

in a car who thought they were French film directors.

So we started the band when he accepted my offer to teach him bass guitar. But it was more than that. It was the decision to pool our ambitions and resources and go for something greater than ourselves, and in this we were aided by one piece of luck: Grant was musical. He could have remained a film student who played the bass, but instead he quickly became a musician. He had a fantastic singing voice and a perfect melodic knack, unknown when I asked him to start the group. What I did know was that, given his obvious creative tendencies, he would write songs. That it took only six weeks surprised me. But after such a short time, he showed me a bass riff, I wrote a chorus, and it became the first Forster–McLennan composition. It was called ‘Big Sleeping City’, and we played it for a year.

Being in a band and releasing our first single – ‘Lee Remick / Karen’, in September 1978 – gave us a certain instant notoriety, which we both enjoyed. For Grant it gave him things at 20 that a film career mightn’t have handed him until he was 30: recognition, creative adventure, the instant smell that we were going places. The journey had begun. The first vial of our friendship was put aside and we became The Go-Betweens. And from then on we set off on the crusade, with the band as first priority in our lives. We travelled, recorded, added and lost members, and built up the best body of work we could until we crashed 11 years later. Occasionally, through these years, Grant and I would catch each other’s eye – as we flew into New York, or played a big Danish rock festival, or went on a French TV show – and think, this is what we did it for, these pop moment milestones that both of us had dreamed of back in Brisbane, at the beginning.

Through all of this we stayed good friends. There was something special about our friendship that we could take deep into our work, making crucial creative decisions along the way and never flaring up or tearing at each other. We operated on two rules: each was to have the same number of songs on every album, and we both had to agree on something before we did it. Our confidence in what we could do was amazing. It was as if being in The Go-Betweens gave us an invisible shield, allowing us to believe that nothing could knock us out. Grant was central to this. Every album was “our best so far”, and any time I dipped in confidence he was there to pick me up. He was a great working partner. Not only the songs – ‘Cattle and Cane’, ‘Bachelor Kisses’, ‘Bye Bye Pride’, ‘Streets of Your Town’, ‘Finding You’, ‘Boundary Rider’ – but also as an up-close inspirational artist in my life.

This is what he was like. I’d drive over to his place to play guitar and he’d be lying on a bed reading a book. Grant never felt guilt about this. The world turned and worked; he read. That was the first message. He’d offer to make coffee, and I knew – and here’s one of the great luxuries of my life – I knew I could ask him anything, on any artistic frontier, and he’d have an answer. He had an encyclopaedic mind of the arts, with his own personal twist. So, as he worked on the coffee, I could toss in anything I liked – something that had popped up in my life that I needed his angle on. I’d say, “Tell me about Goya,” or, “What do you know about Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry?” or, “Is the Youth Group CD any good?” And, his head over the kitchen table, he’d arch an eyebrow just to ascertain that I was serious, which I always was. Then he’d start. Erudite, logical, authoritative and never condescending – not one ounce of superiority came with the dispensing of his opinion. God. I’m going to miss that. And of all the holes his departing has left, this for me is the biggest: the person you can go to who is so much on your wavelength, stocked with shared experience, whom you don’t ask for life advice – Grant would be one of the last people there! – but who, as a fellow artist, you can go toe to toe with and always come away totally inspired by. Well, that’s a great thing.

And it wasn't only me. Since his death, his role as inspirer and informer has come out strongly in remembrance. An old friend, Steve Haddon, says, "Meeting Grant in 1976 was like getting an education." Another friend, Andrew Wilson, writes, "Thank you for playing 'Johnny Jewel', *Blonde on Blonde*, and Jane Birkin to me in a wooden Spring Hill room." Of the 1500 responses that quickly sprung up on the internet, many spoke of a meeting with Grant, in a bar, a café, somewhere in the world, when he told them something of someone – made an inspired artistic connection, a tip that these people carried with them. His place here is as a true hipster, in the 1940s and '50s sense of the word. Someone perched on the streets, in the saloons, on the lower side of life, possessing razor-sharp and deep knowledge of the cultural front – but never lording it in the traditional manner. Half jokingly, I once suggested he return to academia. He laughed the idea off, preferring to be the secret holder of wisdom "on a barstool throne".

The break-up of the band in 1989 was savage and abrupt. Grant and I had had enough. We'd written six lauded albums and the band was broke. In the end, we were doing Sydney pub gigs to pay ourselves wages. It was a nasty treadmill. Grant and I had planned to go on as a duo and do an acoustic album, but this got blown sky-high when his girlfriend left him on the day he told her that the band was over. The next weeks were chaos. Grant was destroyed. I stayed, consoling him and trying to make sense of the mess that we had brought on by trying to gain our freedom. But then I had to follow my own heart and return to Germany, where I'd found the beginnings of a new life over the last six months. The duo idea hit the rocks when Grant informed the record company he wanted a solo career. The fact that he told them before me hurt. But he had a girlfriend to try and win back, and this coloured many of his decisions over the next years.

For the remainder of the decade we had fulfilling solo careers. It was great to work alone and grow. There were letters and calls between us, uneasy given the differences between our new worlds – him in the cauldron, me in the Bavarian countryside. We both felt happy to have the band behind us, immensely proud of the work we'd done, but drained from all that it had taken out of us. When my first solo album, *Danger In The Past*, came out I didn't even want to leave the house. There was only one show in Australia: in Sydney, where Grant joined me. Professionally, that's what we did together for the remainder of the decade; every eighteen months or so, an offer would come in from some part of the world, attractive enough for Grant and I to do a one-off acoustic show together, catch up, and then go back to our own lives.

There was one other thing, though: the film script. This was a crazy dream dating back to the late '70s. When Grant and I started working together, The Go-Betweens was to be the calling card, the most visible and instantly attractive thing we did. Behind it, we had a number of other ideas we were going to unleash upon the world once the band was famous, which our 20-year-old minds figured would be in about three years. It was the Orson Welles theory: get famous at one thing, and then bring on everything else you can do. So there was a film and a book in the wings. The film was a jewel-heist caper set on the Gold Coast and then Sydney, a vehicle aimed at our favourite American actor of the time, James Garner. The book was going to be a microscopic dissection and ode to our favourite pop-star of all time, Bob Dylan, and it was going to be called 'The Death of Modern America: Bob Dylan 1964-66' (which still rings like a great line to me).

Neither got beyond rough fragments, though the wish to write a film together stayed. So, in 1995, with both of us back in Brisbane, we spent three months in the bowels of the Dendy cinema in George Street writing a film called 'Sydney

Creeps'. It was wonderful being in a room together working on something other than music, though the script is not as good as it should be. The wrestling over each line and plot twist robbed it of flow and a strong voice. Still, it was done, and there it was: a thick notebook written in longhand, many lines crossed out and written over, lying in a trunk of Grant's last possessions.

We reconvened the band in 2000. Over the next six years we recorded three albums, toured, and took the whole thing, to our great pleasure, up another level. We were on the cusp of something. It's strange to say that about a band that had existed for 17 years, but with Adele and Glenn, our bass player and drummer, by our side, all doors still felt open. We were still up for the championship, and we had a growing audience willing us on to bigger and better things. And we had new songs: Grant had a fantastic batch for an album we were going to do next year. I said to him that all my writing up until the recording would just be catching up to what he had. Album number ten was going to be something special.

Yet he wasn't happy. He was proud of the band's recent success, and his private life, after a long bumpy ride, was settled. He was in love, and the most content and up I'd seen him in a long time. But deep down there remained a trouble, a missing piece that he was always trying to find but never did. Family, a loving girlfriend, a circle of friends: all could count for so much, and it *was* a hell of a lot, but it could never cover over a particular hurt. When Grant was four, his father died. Perhaps it stemmed from this. The missing father, the anchor that would have kept him in friendlier waters and, maybe, on narrower paths through his life. He cut a lonely figure. He was sad. Sometimes I would visit him and it would take me an hour to pull him out. Twice in his life I was with him when he was totally shattered. And there were many years I missed when we weren't in the same city.

I can remember being hit by the lyrics he put to his first songs. I was shocked by their melancholy and the struggle for joy. I'd known the happy-go-lucky university student. As soon as he wrote, there it was. Any appreciation or remembrance of Grant has to take this into account. He didn't parade it, but it's all over his work, and it was in his eye.

His refuge was art and a romantic nature that made him very lovable, even if he did take it to ridiculous degrees. Here was a man who, in 2006, didn't drive; who owned no wallet or watch, no credit card, no computer. He would only have to hand in his mobile phone and bankcard to be able to step back into the gas-lit Paris of 1875, his natural home. I admired this side of him a great deal, and it came to be part of the dynamic of our pairing. He called me "the strategist". He was the dreamer. We both realised, and came to relish, the perversity of the fact that this was an exact reversal of the perception people had of us as artists and personalities in the band – that I was the flamboyant man out of time and Grant the sensible rock. In reality, the opposite was true.

The last time I saw him was about two weeks before he died. The circumstances of the visit were the same as they'd been for almost 30 years: to play guitar together and do the catch-up with an old friend. He had a two-storey granny flat at the back of the house he lived in, and we played on a small deck there. A railroad track runs behind the house, and occasionally trains passed through the songs. We took breaks from the playing, and talked; we had such fun together. Talking. Always talking and gossiping – silly stuff we'd go round and round on.

After four hours I left. He was standing on the front veranda as I walked down to the front gate. In the mailbox was a wrapped copy of the *New York Review of Books*. I took it out and looked at the cover. I called to him, saying I didn't know he got this. He told me he had a subscription, and if I wanted to I could borrow back-

issues. I thanked him, said I would and then said goodbye. As I walked to the car and got in, I wondered how many singer-songwriters or rock stars in the world got the *New York Review of Books* delivered on subscription. Not many, I thought. Maybe just one.

GRANT MCLENNAN

1958 - 2006

Grant William McLennan (12 February 1958 – 6 May 2006) was an Australian singer-songwriter with the alternative rock band The Go-Betweens, which he co-founded with Robert Forster in Brisbane, Australia in 1977. In a career spanning almost thirty years, his work with The Go-Betweens (1977–89, and resuming 2000–06) is complemented by several solo releases and side-project collaborations with other performers. McLennan received a number of accolades recognising his achievements and contributions as songwriter and lyricist, including the naming of his 1983 composition "Cattle and Cane" by the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) as one of the 30 greatest Australian songs of all time.

McLennan died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 48.

McLennan was born in the city of Rockhampton, central Queensland. Four years later he moved with his family to Cairns after the death of his father, a G.P. The family then relocated to a cattle station in central Far North Queensland, with McLennan spending five years at Brisbane's Church of England Grammar School ("Churchie") as a boarder. A number of McLennan's songs evoke the impressions and imagery of the regional background of his childhood, such as the breakthrough "Cattle and Cane", "Dusty in Here" (about his father), "Boundary Rider", and "Bye Bye Pride."

In 1976 McLennan began a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland. The long-serving and controversial Joh Bjelke-Petersen was State Premier at the time, and McLennan was arrested in a student protest against aspects of his conservative policies.

A year later, he first met with Robert Forster, who encouraged him to learn bass guitar (McLennan had no musical training) and join with him in forming a band. After several months playing and songwriting, the duo recorded and released their first 7" single in 1978, Forster's "Lee Remick" (B-side "Karen," 500 copies pressed). In this initial period Forster performed most of the songwriting, vocals and guitar; however as McLennan's own distinctive compositional style developed the two would soon share in songwriting and vocals for the band almost equally. For all Go-Betweens releases from about 1980 forward, all songs were credited to "Forster/McLennan", although the two composers often wrote separately, each singing their own compositions.

By the time their first album was released (1982's *Send Me A Lullaby*), the Go-Betweens' line-up expanded to include Lindy Morrison as their permanent drummer. Later releases added Robert Vickers on bass (allowing McLennan to move to lead guitar), and then Amanda Brown on oboe, violin and a variety of other instruments (Brown and McLennan were in a relationship for several years during this time). John Wilsteed then replaced Vickers on bass after the latter left the band for their last album.

After recording six albums, The Go-Betweens disbanded in December 1989. Through the 1990s, McLennan recorded four well-received solo albums, collaborated on two albums with The Church's Steve Kilbey in the band Jack Frost, and collaborated with Powderfinger's Ian Haug in Far Out Corporation.

Forster and McLennan reformed The Go-Betweens in 2000, and recorded three more albums. Their last studio album, *Oceans Apart*, won the band their first ARIA

Award for Best Adult Contemporary Album. Their That Striped Sunlight Sound DVD was nominated for Best Music DVD at the 2006 awards.

Grant McLennan died at his home in Brisbane on 6 May 2006, aged 48, from a heart attack. He was preparing for a party at his home to celebrate with his fiancée, Emma Pursey. Whilst preparing for the party, he complained of feeling unwell, and went upstairs to rest. He died in his room and was found soon after by his flatmate, friends and fiancée.

Over 1,000 people attended his funeral, including musicians Dave Dobbyn, Steve Kilbey, Paul Kelly and Ed Kuepper.

Cattle and Cane

I recall a schoolboy coming home
Through fields of cane
To a house of tin and timber,
And in the sky a rain of falling cinders.
From time to time
The waste memory – wastes!
I recall a boy in bigger pants,
Like everyone
Just waiting for a chance.
His father's watch,
He left it in the showers,
From time to time
The waste memory – wastes!
I recall a bigger brighter world,
A world of books
And silent times in thought,
And then the railroad,
The railroad takes him home
Through fields of cattle,
Through fields of cane.
From time to time
The waste memory – wastes!
The waste memory – wastes!
Further, longer, higher, older.

Dusty in Here

Like a ghost,
A ghost of something old,
It's cold and dusty in here.
Just twenty years
And six feet down I'm told,
I know your face,
I share your name.

In the dark
When shadows have their way,
A finger's a chimney
And the moon's on fire.
Then sleep arrives,
He's got his bags and wares,
The dragon sleeps
And St. George stares.

You won't write, no you won't write,
That's all I ask, that you just write.
And you say no, that you can't speak,
You've lost your voice, you let it go,
You let it go.

Like a ghost,
A ghost of something old,
It's cold and dusty in here.
It's in your hand,
It sits just like a glove,
The finger traces the lines of love.

It's cold and dusty in here.
Someone you knew
Is watching you.
I'm someone you knew!

Spring Rain

Dressed in a white shirt with my hair combed straight,
Here in my black shoes and me without a date,
Me without hindsight, me without...
When will change come, just like spring rain?
Falling down like sheets
(falling down like sheets)
Coming down like love
(coming down like love)
Falling at my feet
(falling just like)
Spring rain.

Standing on the lawn with cousins and child brides,
Caught for the camera on their best sides.
Being caught forewarned,
their best sides,
When will change come
Just like spring rain?

Driving my first car,
My elbows in the breeze,
With all these people that I never, never need!
These people are excited by their cars,
I want surprises just like spring rain!

Falling just like sheets
(falling just like sheets)
Coming down so hard
(coming down so hard)
Falling at my feet
(falling just like)
Spring rain.
Coming down like love
(coming down like love)
Falling here so smooth
(falling here so smooth)
Falling in that groove
(falling just like)
Spring rain.
Falling down like love
(falling, falling)
Coming down so hard
(falling down)
You hear it fall falling down
Spring rain.
Falling just like love
(falling, falling)

Falling down so hard
(falling down)
You hear it fall falling down
Spring rain.

Bye Bye Pride

A white moon appears
Like a hole in the sky,
The mangroves go quiet.
In la Brisa de la Palma
A teenage Rasputin
Takes the sting from a gin.
When a woman learns to walk
She's not dependent anymore,
A line front her letter, May 24,
And out on the bay
The current is strong,
A boat can go lost.

But I didn't know someone
Could be so lonesome,
Didn't know a heart
Could be tied up
And held for ransom.

Until you take your shoes
And go outside, stride over stride,
Walk to that tide because
The door is open wide.

Turned the fan off
And went for a walk
By the lights down on Shield Street.
The birds in the trees
Open their wings...
He goes home again.
He dreams resistance,
They talk commitment,
Things change over long distance.
Took the shirt off his back,
The eyes from his head
And left him for dead.

But I didn't know someone
Could be so lonesome,
Didn't know a heart
Could be tied up
And held for ransom.

Until you take your shoes
And go outside, stride over stride,
Walk to that tide, because
The door is open wide.

Little lies, they'll take your pride.
Until you take your shoes
And go outside. Stride over stride,
Walk to that tide, because
The door is open wide!

Stride over stride,
Walk to that tide.
Bye bye pride,
Because the door is open wide.
The door is always open wide.
The door is always open wide!

Magic in Here

Diamonds on the water at five o'clock,
Lovers lie around in tangled knots,
Pulling your picture from a cardboard box
Forget you not, forget me not.

I don't want to change a thing when there's magic,
I don't want to change a thing when there's magic
In here, now the coast is clear,
I got no time for fear.

Time knocks you down like a rolling ball
In memory hall.
Love leaves you clean like a waterfall
Then you hit a wall, hit a wall.

I don't want to change a thing when there's magic,
I don't want to change a thing when there's magic
In here, now the coast is clear,
I got no time for fear!

Boundary Rider

There's a boundary rider
at the five mile fence,
bloodwood, bones + steers.

And the sky's so deep,
you can't find your sleep,
keeps you walking through these tears.

So you reach for things,
you're never satisfied,
you're running down the years.

And to know yourself
is to be yourself,
keeps you walking through these tears.

Some days you ride it hard
to stop them getting out,
then comes the day you ride
to stop them getting in.

There's a boundary rider
on the five mile fence,
bloodwood, bones + steers.

And to know yourself
is to be yourself,
keeps you walking through these tears.

LIONEL FOGARTY

b. 1958

Lionel Fogarty is one of the best known contemporary Aboriginal Australian writers. For some thirty years, he has been excavating a space in which his community and culture is recuperated and asserted, while also subverting and destabilising dominant discourses, both political and poetic. A Yugambeh man, Fogarty was born on Wakka Wakka land in South Western Queensland near Murgon on a 'punishment reserve' outside Cherbourg. Throughout the 1970s, he worked as an activist for Aboriginal Land Rights and protesting Aboriginal deaths in custody. In 1993, his younger brother, Daniel Yock, died while in police custody. He has published numerous collections of poetry in Australia through small presses and major publishing houses. *Dha'gun Jabree Djan Mitti: The More Complete Works of Lionel Fogarty* is being published by Cambridge-based Salt Publishing, bringing his work to his growing international audience.

As well as being integral to any reading of contemporary Australian literature, Fogarty's work fulfils any number of positions within traditional literary and cultural determinations – as postcolonial literature, protest literature, black writing, contemporary surrealism. Drawn from Fogarty's seemingly inexhaustible reserves of imagination, linguistic innovation and experimentation and deep political conscience and drive, his poetry is a powerful transcultural force. It is righteous and revolutionary in its anger over the crimes and injustices perpetrated by White Australia on Australian Aborigines. Fogarty also attacks contemporary Australian poetics with a fierce spirit, recasting language as a weapon and a tool as he writes across and transforms Bandjalang, Aboriginal English, and Australian English, in ways that leave much contemporary experimental poetry seeming effete and pretentious.

Prominent Indigenous Australian novelist, academic and social commentator Anita Heiss recently wrote, "Lionel Fogarty's work as a guerrilla poet has been known to me for over two decades, but he released his first collection of poetry – *Kargun* – in 1980. Lionel has continued to write with powerful passion about issues close to the heart of most Indigenous people: injustice, land rights, identity, language, black deaths in custody and the ongoing consequences of colonisation. Lionel's writing focuses on our need to face a future without oppression and he demonstrates a desire to pass on his own knowledge and experience through the written word."

Sabina Hopfer has commented that Fogarty's poems are, however, "rarely either of a solely political or spiritual nature. Most of them combine both elements". More importantly with regard to usage, Hopfer notes: "The reality of orality constantly challenges and transforms the reality of literacy. Fogarty's aim being to reconcile the two." It is this aim of reconciliation that makes Fogarty's work particularly challenging to conceptions of English (be it Aboriginal English, Australian English or Standard English) and its cultural context – and potentially liberating for colonised and coloniser alike: the complex hybridisation in Fogarty's work is an invitation to cross-cultural understanding that challenges both writer and reader to pursue greater understanding of themselves and their relationship with each other within a shared linguistic community.

The challenge is bi-directional as it demands of the poem's speaker an equal commitment to self-understanding and communication, reconciling dichotomies of usage and identity (oral/literate, spiritual/political, indigenous/non-indigenous, past/present, self/other) into a shared experience and language community focused in the poem. As an act of reconciliation arguably demands, Fogarty's poems asks both reader and speaker to give to the other, and, in the process, produce an example of a community able to exist and function from plural centres. Fogarty's use and development of Aboriginal English in terms of postcolonial literature represents not simply an effort at cultural maintenance and recuperation, but also its inscription on equal terms with national and international literatures. As such, his work can be seen not simply as a counterdiscourse but as an integrated, less dialectically defined, reconception of English – literature and usage – wherein a reciprocal biculturalisation is demanded of the colonisers.

The complexity of Fogarty's poetry lies both in its cultural and linguistic resources. Fogarty's poetry demands readers to engage with and consider broader areas of Aboriginal and coloniser history. Combining a brutally direct gaze and statement with allusion and elision, Fogarty forces readers who accept the challenges of his work to fill the gaps in their knowledge with regard to Aboriginal history and culture, while refiguring their position in an utterly changed symbolic landscape. Fogarty notes:

What I try to do in my writings is to show that no matter what English you get, English is the most bastardised language in the world – but it's not all bad – it does not give any natural flavour to what Aboriginal language is about. At the same time I try to show them that Aboriginal language is a natural language, is a god-given language, a very spiritual language.

This relationship that Fogarty is consciously developing between English and Aboriginal languages represents at one level a postcolonial re-inscription of English into the power flows that it has disrupted and in many cases heinously destroyed, and at another level, presents an active and participatory reconception of English as stemming from plural sources and not reduceable to normative linguistic or cultural constructions. Fogarty's work protests the various injustices perpetrated on Aboriginal populations over the course of Australia's colonial/postcolonial history, and demands understanding and justice be reached that is not dictated by the dominant discourse nor in its bastardised terms. Confronting and relentless in its pursuit of understanding and justice on its own terms, Fogarty's work opens up new paths towards these ends. Fogarty noted:

The way I see my books going . . . is creating a collective thought within people so they they can go back and read other Aboriginal literature or whiteman's literature, either historical or present-day, or when they read things like deaths in custody, this will help them to meditate, so that they can create an energy, good energy.

Fogarty's poetry becomes a site in which colonisation and dispossession are played out, destabilising the invading tradition and colonising language that wrought havoc on indigenous culture, languages and identity. Fogarty's work demands the reader attend both to the culture recuperated and the language in which this recuperation occurs. Having read Fogarty's work, it is impossible to view Australian poetry in the same way again without thereby being complicit in the

alienation and dispossession that the work protests against. This is poetry to read and re-read, to attend and open to and so be changed by, in painful, uncomfortable and harrowing ways, and so come closer to an understanding of the still living history of Australian injustice and dispossession.

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Lionel Fogarty's "Tired of Writing"

There's no denying that on a first reading Lionel Fogarty's poetry can be an uncomfortable experience. His poems might initially seem "ungrammatical", littered with what might be considered grammatical "errors", "anomalies" and "inconsistencies". Yet this only remains true if we persist in reading Fogarty through the prism of standard English grammar, if we impose our way of reading upon his way of writing. If, on the other hand, we approach his poetry as written in deliberately broken English, in a language which intentionally disrupts standard English grammar, we might come to see that part of Fogarty's aim is in fact to break English and the powerful position it holds as our nation's official language.

While it can't be contested that the bulk of Fogarty's poetic vocabulary is drawn from English, the syntactical, grammatical and thematic structures of his poetry reflect those of certain Indigenous languages, particularly the Murri language, which is his own.* The result is a language which is inescapably, and even primarily Indigenous. It is English Aboriginal, rather than Aboriginal English. By inverting the power dynamic between English (the language of settlement) and Indigenous Australian languages, Fogarty demonstrates language's potential to be an instrument of liberation as well as a means of oppression – that it offers the possibility of a way of writing premised on active (and at times violent) resistance to subjugation.

"Tired of Writing" can be read as a kind of *ars poetica*. "Sometimes me write bad/ just to be glad", Fogarty admits, the majority of the poem being written in language which resists and problematizes traditional ways of reading English. The last six lines, however, are written in technically perfect grammar: "To write I have to use/ a medium/ that is not mine./ If I don't succeed, bear with me./ I see words beyond any acceptable meaning/ And this is how I express my dreaming". These lines emphasise that the poem's earlier, unconventional grammar is not accidental, but a deliberate tactic on the poet's part. They also encourage us to reconsider what might, on first reading, have been dismissed as "slippages" or "errors" in the poem's language, and in doing so to discover how such instances might strain "beyond any acceptable meaning".

To pick but one example, the line "I see it is a putting something/ from nothing, that's my practice" is easily "corrected" to read "pulling something from nothing" – as the English idiom would normally go. And yet Fogarty has written "putting" not "pulling". The subversion supplants an act of taking away (pulling) with an act of placing or giving (putting), and from that point alone can be extrapolated all kinds of readings. "Pulling something from nothing", for instance, might be another way of rewording the doctrine of settlement by *terra nullius*, upon which Australia's colonisation was legally premised, in which case "putting something from nothing" (an opposite act) might be read as a counter gesture, an act of de-colonisation. But this is only one of many possible readings. The point is that Fogarty is working within the English language – in this case by exploiting the

aural and visual similarities between two English words – to undermine its suppression of Indigenous languages, a suppression which is a metonymy for the broader impact of colonial culture upon Indigenous culture.

Mudrooroo, "The Poetry of Lionel Fogarty," Indigenous Literature of Australia (Hyland House), 79-88.

Fellow Being

An' we aborigines in humanity.
The pulses of the red sun give a beat in aboriginal people.
The kissing of winds to trees are the love between aborigines.
Even the water we drink is the pure tears aboriginals share.
We wisely in our humanised aboriginal homes are united under all one colour.
The aboriginal is the bread of man's rich land.
We are the rocks of ages and purpling skies.
Look at every scenery in bush you will see an aboriginal face, body and spirit.
The aboriginal is not owned by any human being on earth.
Our presence is the flesh of fresh new worlds.
We are music that floats into a wonderful note to all ears.
An aboriginal is nature's soil, you pick it up, hold it in your hand and
you will feel our growth in the ground.
We are the gods of man in this land but then we are not humans.
Yet we are part of your kind now hey.
The earth above is our spirituals.
And now if you speak our tongue, don't mean you are native.
The sea, hills and lakes are in our hearts and minds.
The universe is belonga to dem big spirit creator.
Oh, now man you go out there to find out more of us, who down here.
Well listen to that fish talk and you will know we ate it the other day.
And if you talk to a bird of paradise you find they are people, same with
all creatures here, we aboriginals come from them.
If you feel the heat of the sun, you feel us.
If you see and feel the light of the darkness then you have just touched an
aborigine.

Capitalism - The Murderer in Disguise

You know I'd like to tell you a story
But I'm afraid
I won't use names.
I thought
now what if I get out of this chair
and walk to the cupboard
get the gun
load it up
and shoot
any white person
that walks
pass this chair
and any black
that cry for them.

I thought
when they're shot
I get out my best knife
cut the heart out
then stuff it in their mouth
until it went down to the gut.

I thought
I must slice off the balls
and shove
in the eyeballs
with blood
spitting out of the nose.

I thought I'll put it in the moi (arse)
to smell the filth
of the white man's brain.
I screwed the neck around
until purple, green and white
lit the face.

I tightly moved my legs
onto his screaming belly.
A silence came
but my pain was still the same.
My legs shook
out of my reality.

A pig (policeman) killed my arms
He laughed and said
"You black bastard
what did he do to you?"

I said
“You make my father’s afraid
then give them a carved body
ready to shatter,
A mind
held in drunkenness
fooled
and worn out.
You make my mother’s afraid
so when she sleeps
an axe appears
covered in blood.”

Look pig
What you do to our people.

Who cares
I’m locked up here
With no arms
No legs
But a body
And mind
Really
My spirit.
But I’m not going to be afraid.
You don’t make me afraid.
Beware, we’ll be out of your prisons.

I was afraid to write this one
real thing
but remember
Your Enemy
He’s
Ours TOO.

Consideration of Black Deaths (story)

'No treaty will give us our laws: it can be broken'
Two brothers were killed up here
didn't even have a chance to live
yes they lived short yet long
cos we never forget them
Two sisters up here are dead
by rape and knife cuts
They were drunk with white men
Yes it's not all their fault
yes don't blame the white-eyes
It's the societies dat the
rich pigs control.
The sheets and blankets of the cells
are a danger to us
The disposable razor are a danger to us.
Now correctional man in times
you have broken the law
how was it when you didn't know
our custom and cultures
you didn't know my tribe
my people's land needs
you didn't feel for us yet
you moved on me with a
untrue law and rules
Yes my correctional man
what happen to the brothers up at Rocky
did you know they were sad
and dat Lawton was sentenced on a white law
Now he was found hanging
from a sheet, now how come
the wired net was not
over the window hey correctional man?
You have ended him as a black man death over life
he needed in his family
Yes, I didn't know him face to face
but I felt his anger as a Murri
Like Robert Hopkins, it does all mean something
he was found wrist slashed and hanging too
yet he wrote to all who are proud to be abos
you hear his voice singing these words
'How many more blacks must die before the white man will understand'
To be back with the family in jail is hard.
Yet they know there is a way out of every ways.
Now in jail Murri men and women needs a black law
so they can come to live a better life and give more
to their community.
The royal commission will come and go I say,

but why is there still deaths of my people.
Well they sit and discuss here and there,
that's OK, yet why not support a more push
to get an aboriginal prison based on helping get good jobs
and culture working in the prisons.
The commission does a lot of good work,
yet it's in the custody of the same white lawless society
that oppresses us.
Yes go into the watch houses and find the evidence,
but remember the back hurt my Murri will feel when you leave.
J. Pilot may have been stopped,
by having a doctor on the job at the jail.
And dat young girl locked up in a cold room
will she be given a fair law to look into,
of why this happened.
I say aborigines are scared of evil spirits
dat white man and
women ways
so for a start you put us in there to rot
and rotten it is.

Yes we've broken your laws and this is wrong to you.
Well we are native people denied too long our rights
to a cultural law of our own.
We believe in the light of good
we are honest until we are found black death in custody.
210 years we are in the custody of white people.
Even our homes, land, sky and air your law hurt us
make us sad when we are glad
give us grog and we take it to the limit,
like punching up in a fight between ourselves
yes we do kill one another
yes we do undo our race,
but this is helped by your work in keeping white power alive.
I am like the wind too, we change.
But you have left my people in a unchangeable way.
They see it's fit to break and enter your white homes.
Roll your man for money, even some black men say to themselves,
let's rape this white woman for they are white with a past of sin.
Now I don't want my people to just hurt white people for the fun of it.
But do it in a school, educated speaking, writing rap, dat will
kill them with the truth, rape their minds
tell pure in Murri thinking.
leave their bodies for they undo themselves.
you Murri prisoner in there now
must fight with minds at ease
cool, calm, and knowing we care, love and think of you all.
First the representing of Murris must be Murris
get rid of migglou who are there
like this Premier Goss.
Not doing much for Murri culture, law and land rights

is a sell out brother
he is just a white man dressed to kill the real justice of all land
owned by black law
without the white law interfering.

Now we have a black top man in this department of black affairs.
You see Murri, anyone goes and work for white controlled place
have to be coated paint of black but think white.

Now Les Melzer don't say overturn
you are just patronising our own people,
cos if you wanta do something, get all white out of there
and say this a Murri revolutionary takeover
but you Les are paid by white Ann Warner.

Get it Murri Prisoners
it's a fight everywhere.

Our people are more confused than ever.

You see, the prison you in is our prison
yet we have the opportunities
anyway let's get all Murri to stop this hanging
or trying it out of the life we need to build.

Like you I'm lonely too

I feel like killing himself too,

but I don't want some white law find me out of my mind or insane

I feel, think I will do myself in,

Yes, kill, die get out of this too,

for like my other brother and sister I must do it.

Where's the sheet and blankets and razor and anything else?

Then a sound came over my room

'Here it's nigger boy'

'Here it's abo boy'

It was the correctional officer and a police officer say

'Look he's drunk, mate lock him up with no mattress or blankets'.

Lucky I woke up, this was not a dream,

and thinking my bed it's the 1990s

and still my Murri die up here in QLD.

Well I'm off to see you soon

and tell you,

you're not to blame for what you've tried to take your life.

We all have attempted suicide since whites came to our homes.

We've hurt, cried and died.

Yet we have lived a life happy.

My Murri prison will be a prison of learning to get ways
of not returning to prison.

The dark love is not seen but I see you all.

The large wall I seen

but I have been through it.

My love for you as dying prisoner is living to free you

our fight for your cultural freedom is not over yet.

But I'm here not free to their law.

Yet free under the Murri law.

Sure we got to work out our Murri law, work alongside Murri law.
Yes dat must be done with you all
dead and alive even unborn
The prejudice is real in the schools
so it's real in the prison
The racisms are rebated and born
all the time with this country,
cos of the many people who
are dumb affair scared and uneducated

The stress is great in all Murri
family cos not enough talk action
of all Murri to our culture and
giving a way to fight the
love losted in years.
Yes many more is to be said
but one Murri will have a
mind broken down to the ground
if we say what really is happen.
But we must do it.
Self-determination is part of all
Murri family spirits. We will get
our heritage in the canoe
and sail on the beautiful life.
Yes prepare now man in jail
the time has come to your time
yet when you get out, it's back
to the same thing alcohol, drugs
and hurting each other. Yes, know
is hard to cool the lack of boredom
but you must try.
Our identity most us know
but do we arrest the ones dat
disobey the little you gave to life.
Brother you were out there
in front of the demo but what
did it give you freedom or to go
back in for more.
When one die in jail all of us die outside.
When one dies out here, you live to fight
so no-one die on the inside.
Yes commissioner you're white
The Murri prisoners are short in life
but long in spirits.

My Cry is Lost in a Name

Propelled
in giving me damned names
They gave me unknowing roots
White with jewels of nakedness
Sights — silenced
then demanded to catch shadows
travelling aware in innocence
But as mixed up in trickery
of my tree roots
I found myself
sucked by seed
I felt dressed in native trees
Then having urgency to wipe away
white values
I drunk healthiness
I learned more about my ended Shakespeare name
coming back
the snakes began attacking
Spears came travelling in my thighs
leaving me
Rejuvenated
No more my damned name.

Manipulation Modifies Your Structures

Verbal communication is what we like
Verbal knowledge is what we like
Reading ability in talking we like
Our components of language is stronger
Than criteria type trends
Our vocabulary is a mixed world-over
Our new trend co-existences are words in medium spirits
Formation comes from techniques etc
Matter concepts requires characteristics
Mother's spoken words visually transition personal individual speeches
orientated
Educated tests are an admission to
Dependency of whitefella interviews
Educate quantitative human based degrees must give greater technological
importance
To aborigines arts workforces
Verbal bull forms activity to this stage
Verbal bull dust relates modern graduates
Our age video cd's and tapes are cramming
Children's aspired relevant solving
Our old memory social reality are utility to recipes imperative inherent to levels
Foundation only develops by black jarjum's (children)
Handling problem-solving
Listening in rich atmospheres and giving back respective points within learning

Remember Something Like This

Long ago a brown alighted story was told
as a boy looked up on the hall walls
water flowed to his eyes
for Starlight was carrying snake in his shirt
gut belly
and around the fires a tall man
frightened the mobs that black eyes promised
that night at giant tree, way up
bushes crept in the ant hill
was the wild blackfella
from up north, they said.
Soldier chained him down at the waterhole
but as they bent to dip, sip
behind their backs, old man Waterflow
flew clear, magic
undoing the shackles, without keys
or sounds of saw
saw . . . nuh . . . you didn't saw him.
He's old Waterflow, even I'm too young
to remember everything.
Yet clever than pictures them show off
making fun of old Boonah
sitting outside waiting for dreaming
to come in reality.
After that somebody broke into the store.
Oh, the police were everywhere
at every door, roof, in laws
Where's this and that, you know.
So they find out where him came from
by looking at the tracks.
He's headed for the caves
just near Milky Way.
Happy in strength, we took off
but the hills hid this tribal
bull-roaring feather foot
under Jimmy's Scrub
place up deep
where you have to leave smoke
if you want to hunt there
If you don't, you'll get slewed . . .
On earth our people are happy
but we couldn't find that food.
Musta been up the Reservoir
or expecting a life to run over near Yellow Bar cave
again.
But we bin told, one man got badly porcupine.
Bring him home and not supposed to.

So him get sick, all life time
like green hands touch Murri legs
that's why you don't swim too late
at this creek created.
A spoiled boy one afternoon, went repeating
the bell bird singing.
And he went and went
and sent to Green Swamp, back of the grid.
Then as eels were caught
Aunties sang out, this the biggest
I've ever seen.
Come boys get more wood, we'll stay
here all night.
So sat waiting, a bit dark, tired light
the lines pulling in slowly
for fish seem to be in message
but two-headed creature appeared
legs chucked back
fires went out
the fish swam back
we raced home.
All cold that night, back of the bend
and rocks.
Just near the bunya tree you can see
this middle age woman, long black hair
walk past our Nanna Rosies' place
up to the graveyards
but she flows
and many moons came shone in our minds
watching Dimmydum and Kingy doing corroboree
on stage
in front of her children.
A light story past thru windows
on to you all
never forget
remember more . . .

Poet's Note: Boonah: peace maker

Gibar Magic

A young magic man saw there was
no mountains left by this
land cos of man's destruction
So he blow magic and said
Bajeirjeir jungamu
be there a mountain in front of me
And there was a great mountain
where people gather at the body
of it, to dance from grass
trees and animal lives
So it rained and water came
down from the mountain creating
a foundation of harmony
Then after many years a
big storm come rushing
flood flowed over every hut
and lightning hit trees causing
fires, everything was like
a bombed land where people
are helpless and the mountain
was dying, then the young
magic man came back
from his travels and sang
out to the people, here here
live in a *Nala Nala*
it is a hole, where you will be
safe for a while
Now here the magic man
gave a powerful blowing
magic that all storm wind
and flood waters lightning
disappeared and cool air
became fresh cleaner and
the people and animals came
out giving thanks to this
young magic man.
And he heard their thanks and
smiled and a smile you will
see in any Aboriginal

Mortal to Immortal

The morning spits up the sun
Below my bed my lips peels
Yo our child's Hullabaloo over
Keeping our first abo culture good
Clean shaven back lands
And we sunstruck by a colourless talk by Americanos
The afternoon spits up the starred night
Below my head lays eyes looking
At the nose's arse-end of this world
A first fella said I want to be oblivious
'what for?' cos midday squinting toward
a trespassive on Murri land
Rumour field the house of every Peoples Spirits of;
'how come a sickle moon kisses earth and found out what heart'
Toned cry sitting love makes
So fuck love for yesterdays dump
So lullaby away dreams that don't come true
Those Murri skills remain are
Future clumsy flinch with business
Those Murri hobnailed on naming
Each other cabs calm in drawer for a bit of money
The rituals gentle Murri sorcery
Gives ancient weathered faces
Stout to taut the looter?
Awake now readers and seed basic
Eternal life humble shipped out
Of man's sorrow affairs
Murri old commanded us us
Murri young commanded us us
The morning wings me to supreme sacrifice
According to the perished

Tired of Writing

A long time since I picked up a pen
Again.
And I had to pick ability in writing
Some call it poetry
I see it as putting something
from nothing, that's my practice.
Carrying targets of beauty and living
first tongue, painless are my words.
We foresee sterile crippled shadows
healing are answers.
Midnight whitened muscles that
frosted a country's autumn.
My mind in time
is what rhymes.
Now I'm of sometime
Long tomorrows will make summer sooner.
Sometimes me write bad
just to be glad.
Little we read
dead seeds may be reeds of life fullness.
So I wrote.
But will you remote, note
Space took a pace
Rat race
whata play, ace
Just in fine line
Our true times
Are never true.
Sometimes I don't think.
To write I have to use
a medium
that is not mine.
If I don't succeed, bear with me.
I see words beyond any acceptable meaning
And this is how I express my dreaming ...

21 July 1982

Lone Meditation

Master oceans winged up in mists
Master self guilty to look unblamed oftentimes cautions
stumbles leaf, intruder turn, so must weave deeds
wickedness beyond a highest punishment.
Master twilight foundation and remote come
it some honest flesh. Erect laughs owned in likeness
and master chains tired by winds of crippled handcuffs.
Fulfillment master rise cherished freedoms.
Yes, master peacemaker in your element souls.
The passion forests sphere hearts serenity
majesty thunder wondering chosen potions off thirsts
that treasure a truth pathness.
Master revealed depths, ears arrests echoing earthness.
Master ceasing tides refreshed in racism
Master this and we'll born sweetness of friendship
sailed not in goals.
The cage escape solitude as a scholar
so conduct timelessness measure some memories bounded.
Master strengthen loitering to be rudely
bottom of the aimlessly gone.
For master or not, befallen expansion not saving abundance.
Invisible neglects beclouded heritage
pleasuring flower that mastered harping
gather inter beautifulness.
The world turned worshipping an indeed river
flooded by Aborigines
that's when trembling lonelier hada
master silence dawning fullness of sun rising
beholding spring never graced and merry hairy golden quiet
conquering did not glory power
to master disaster, oh mountains
mist crystals seas to stay
moontide must we master.

30/11/82

Free Our Dreams

Out of the hole we came out of a hole
filled with poles of unfolded the reasons
As it flies past
songs came off in blood
We find strength to be blue and red
ride it to expansion
Yet you people miss what they came as
miss everything living that lives for
Power.

Don't give then the human power
that makes green frogs cut open for enjoyment
Make it the kind of compassion
for establishment rules on love
Smelling noises
of burning finger tips
Water came falling
Like digesting loud rushing pains
Eaten a sickly sight of spirituality.

Treat us to a barking laughter
like running creeks
speared out for swimming fish
dead leaves, dead weeds go with our seeds
Roots grown out
mingling with shining desire

Free our dreams.

24 December 1980

Planet Earth

There is a country
burned of ashes
far beyond the stars
where stands a skillful war
left below
so calm, so cool
This country mine
weeps away falling dews
Leaves then foolish men
but one, who will command the change
There, above the noise
Sweet peace crowned country
Awaits our beauty

Smiles.

Dreamtime

The first homo sapiens is
we aborigines
The different ideas 'bout origins
only you running human like people
present state
This old naturally wise earth
not their scientific knowledge
Brothers million love remains
outside nowadays
But savage are there commonly believed
Theory of evolution we developed
things living as original form of lifes.
Sisters modern human existence
not in there mixed.
Come brief kindly born earth
making scientists native
the related common ancestors.
WE NOT APES
maps are in your sapiens
unwise species.
Don't we create spirits
the first and everlasting two
every Murri distribution of wealth
we have done for this country
so we musn't pay tax
on our homing wealth
that stays within
we are the first or the last
human being
homo sapiens, aborigines
Well tell we deep
Private thoughts.

PHILIP HODGINS

1959 – 1995

Philip Hodgins was born at Katandra West, near Shepparton, Victoria, on 28 January 1959. His parents were dairy farmers, and the experience of growing up on a farm in rural Australia would become central to Hodgins's poetry. He was educated in Geelong, and after leaving school worked as a sales representative for the international publishing company Macmillan. In November 1983, Hodgins was diagnosed with leukaemia, and given just three years to live; the illness proved an important spur in his decision to pursue a career as a poet. In 1986, he enrolled at the University of Melbourne as a full-time student, and the same year published his first poetry collection, *Blood and Bone*, which won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Poetry in 1987. In 1987, he married writer Janet Shaw, with whom he had two children.

Hodgins remained a prolific and much admired poet for the rest of his lifetime, publishing four further major collections: *Poetry Australia* (1988), *Animal Warmth* (1990), *Up on All Fours* (1993), and *Things Happen* (1995), and a verse novella, *Dispossessed: A Tale of Modern Rural Australia* (1994). A skilful exponent of traditional poetic forms, Hodgins's poetry often reflects on aspects of his personal experience, such as life and work in Australian rural communities, and on living with a terminal illness, in measured, unsentimental and sometimes stark imagery.

Hodgins died on 18 August 1995, at Maryborough, Victoria. One of the founders of the Mildura Writers Festival in 1994, he was honoured in 1997 by the establishment of the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal, awarded annually to a consistently outstanding Australian writer.

The Birds

The time is nearly five a.m.
and all the birds are on the go.
They sound just like the frequencies
of many twiddled radios.

It's really bad the way it's gone —
I always used to sleep okay
and dream and miss the rural life
and never see the break of day.

But since I got the only part
in cancer's scripted dialogue
I've heard those birds a million times
and seen the sun come up a lot.

I've been rehearsing death each night,
and still I haven't got it right.

After a Dry Stretch

The rain appears, as always, from the west.
Behind the mountain ranges it seems at first
to be a bigger, purpler, more distant range:
a counterpoint for some corellas, their wings
turning whitenesses on and off, unsynchronized.
Soon, almost quietly going about its business,
a marriage of elements descends the foothill slopes
and settles in for the day on the flat country.
In minutes your field of view is brought up close:
through rain there is only more rain further back
and cow shapes with their colours all washed out.
Reconstituting paddocks, eliminating dust
the rain is what was promised by machines.
Remembering its way by feel down gullies
it gathers colour, plaited milky brown, and reaches
the creek all stirred up, back together at last.
Getting through barricades of its own making,
hastily putting up new ones out of any loose wood,
water-rat-matted coats of dead rushes, bright plastics,
it repeats itself, stuttering in the tight situations
and growing in confidence over the broad deep lengths,
determined not to be drawn out in the next transition.
Now in the paddocks there are frogs, unpuffed,
still sluggish and flecked with dirt. Their credo
is sequential, 'Add water, reproduce, avoid snakes'.
Even the big ones are learning all over again:
they react by mating with the toe of your boot
when you give them a nudge. Their talkback
is regular as the rain, though lower and sharper.
Not far away, in a galvanized machinery shed
diesel is cascading into the tractor already hitched
to a ton and a half of crop seed on wheels.
From inside the amplifying shed it sounds like
hard seed is raining down on the corrugated roof.
A nail hole lets in star-small light, and raindrops.

More bags of seed are ready on a loading platform:
they might be sandbags stacked before a flood.
The farmer looks out at his unwritten paddocks,
relieved that all the weather-chat is finished
and that soon he'll be out there for days on end
filling the fallow space with standard lines.
The yard dog chases the old tab across bags
of seed. They both know it's only a game.
Over at the house too, the rain is happiness
for water is chortling into the big tank,
smoke is unravelling from the year's first fire

and mushrooms are forming in the minds of children.

Midday Horizon

The summer's worn-out paddocks
aligned as neatly as quatrains on a page,
one of those highly buffed duco skies,
and in between, a fine graph line
as nervy as a lot of black snakes in the heat.
Great sheets of mirage are lying there
as bright as new galvo.
You squint into the glare until your eyes
are nothing more than two short twitching lines
and see on the horizon
the standing shadow of a eucalyptus tree.
A big mob of sheep is moving to the left,
breaking up and catching up
in slow eddies like a lava flow.
Seen through the hot distorting air
clear flames seem to be tearing off the mob.
A man is walking sheep-slow behind them.
From where you are
his shape is continually being modified
as if he were walking through different dimensions.
Sometimes he seems to slip into separate pieces,
then pull back together, temporarily.
The same thing is happening to the tree.
The man stops
and a low piece of him draws right away this time.
It must be a dog.
You notice the silence, how near it is.
There's no threat that you can see
and yet the thin exposed horizon trembles.

Gum Trees

They're great individuals.
No two are the same.
Each gum tree grows to its own rules
and bends them to suit itself.
It's a long way from Europe
where you find their more uniform cousins
lined up to make rows of avenue sentries
standing correctly in their place,
firm but trembling a little
as the latest in a long line of victory parades
rolls past.
Europeans in Australia have tried to do
the same thing with gum trees
but it doesn't work. You finish up
with a bunch of misfits bent on never conforming.
Their attitude is all over the place.
You notice it
walking along this side of the Goulburn.
Nobody could whip these red gums into shape,
and who'd want to on such a boiling hot day?
It's enough just to stand back and watch
a hundred galahs evaporating suddenly
out of an old giant.
The racket they make gets thrown back
across the water
by the crowd of new gums
who've got their hands full on the other side
where it's standing room only.
Over here things are more relaxed —
some of the veterans are lying down in the shade,
maybe propped up on an angled elbow
or prostrate in an afternoon doze.
They've dropped their bundles of scented leaves
and haven't bothered to wipe the dirt off their feet,
which doesn't matter now.
In retirement you can do as you please.
The old ones still standing feel the same way
and they have an unexpected habit.
Any time of the day or night
without warning
one of them will let go an enormous limb.
There'll be a splitting crash
and then everything will go as quiet as it was
a few seconds earlier.
Houses, parked cars and people have all fallen
to this dangerous caprice.
Early explorers sometimes thought

they were hearing a rifle shot in the distance,
which just shows you
how everything must be interpreted.
Take this well-established grey box
in the middle of these red gums.
For all the world it looks like a tree in the bush
but the fencing contractor
walking through here with his unsentimental chainsaw
only sees good corner-posts ready to hold their own.
After a noisy morning's work
they'll be posted to each corner of the paddock —
anchormen taking the strain
in a tightly contested four-way tug of war
that goes right down to the wire.

Melbourne Heatwave

Looking straight down from that stone and iron bridge
whose foundations are cushioned into the deep mud
by beds of wool bales from the glory days of sheep
the water is slate-coloured, dense but lively
with its light cargo of occasional soft-drink cans,
bright plastic straws, leaves and the neater leaves
of public transport tickets, and its quickly changing
illegible Arabic-shaped script written in sunlight.
Suddenly a coxless four pierces the cut-off line
like an enlarged but nimble water-surface insect,
surging with each perfect pull of the parallel oars
along the centre of the transformed old river.
The shirtless men have skin almost the same colour
as the boat's wood, and all merge into one entity
so you can't tell if they are rowing or being rowed.
Their oars are dipped with dark green at the flared ends.
They shovel humped water, tilting and jiggling light,
each one turning neatly at the end of its cycle
like a stiff-handed signal from a traffic cop.
The sky is tainted pale with the massive smoke
of bushfires out of control an hour north of here
in the Mount Disappointment State Forest and beyond.
It smells of smoke and wood-ash, nothing else,
but I know that there are houses in there too,
dozens of them gone yesterday and last night
along with their dreams of living in the bush.
I try to imagine what the cities of the future
will smell like when they burn: all those gadgets
flaring and melting into the most dreadful fumes.
A gust out of nowhere flings a plastic shopping bag
into a traffic-light post in a hopeless embrace.
The hot wind reminds me of Rome, the sirocco.
Somewhere among the Roman poets I'd been told
that it brings with it the smell of Africa,
of simooms blasting through the ruins of Carthage.
I had even stopped in the crowded Piazza del Popolo
and optimistically sniffed the summer afternoon breeze
as if there might be some truth in what a poet said.
Another time I stood for hours on the bridge
where Christ broke free of the pack of cults.
There was a drought in Italy and the tawny river
was right down and hardly seemed to flow at all.
It stank like the lane at the back of a restaurant.
You wouldn't have guessed that in Horace's Odes
this was a vengeful mass flooding the proud capital.
I talked for a while with an old man beside me
and while we stared into the putrid Tiber

he told me how, not far from here, his son-in-law
had saved a drunken woman who'd fallen in
but that (and here the old man crossed himself)
the poor boy swallowed some of that foul muck
and came down with a terrible disease and died.

The Rise of Theory

*A cloud of critics, of compilers, of commentators,
darkened the face of learning ... Gibbon*

As awful as those seagulls in the park
each poem has its own peculiar shape—
inviolable, and made to fit like love
when only music seems to fool the pain.

Try pounding quatrains into something else
and you'll be there until the theory breaks.
It doesn't matter if it's the teardrop style
(so good for those rewarded by the line)

the latest formal sausages from Yale,
or free verse's deep aversion to the right.
A poem keeps in shape by being reread
while all around it theories go to ground

and seagulls fight each other for a bun.
The flying world's equivalent of white trash
they look so clean and yet the experts say
five million tiny lice on every bird.

Wordy Wordy Numb Numb

Death.
Now there's a word.
He wrote it down.

It didn't take up much space.
You could say it was discreet,
and patient.

He couldn't remember
the first time he'd heard it.
It seemed to have been always there,

like something he owned
as a kind of right or inheritance.
But he wasn't sure if this was true.

He liked the way it rhymed
with breath,
its natural opposite.

He liked it for many reasons,
and because of that
he wrote it down many times

in many different contexts
finding that it had
all sorts of meanings.

Later on, when words had passed,
he backed it up
by dying.

One thing
he had always remembered
was the arrogance of health,

those dumb days
when nothing can touch you,
when death is just one

of the familiar short words:
sun, moon, tree, bread, wine, house, love ...
you know them,

each one worn smooth
as a river stone
with the flow of language

and death the odd one out,
not so much worn smooth
as numb.

Better not to think about it then
and come back to it later
when it comes back to you

like an unpaid debt
gathering interest
infinitely greater than what was lent.

KATE LILLEY

b. 1960

Kate Lilley was born in Perth in 1960, the daughter of Dorothy Hewett and Merv Lilley. She grew up in Perth and Sydney, and began to write poetry in her teenage years. She completed a B.A. at the University of Sydney, and subsequently gained a PhD at the University of London. After spending four years as a Junior Research Fellow at Oxford University she returned to Australia, and since 1990 she has taught in the English Department at the University of Sydney.

Lilley has published widely on early modern women's writing and contemporary poetry, and her own poems have appeared in a number of Australian and international literary journals. Her first poetry collection, *Versary*, was published in 2002.

1972

After the dance we cross the oval in pairs
to the steep bank behind the softball field.
The hall is bolted shut, teachers pass in the dark,
smoking and talking on the way to their cars.
It's cold on the ground, my buttons loose to the sky.

Countrypolitan

Many words are falling you don't care
wasted lips forget and have some fun

each time you leave I make a vow
this will draw the line

thanks for something I can't win
heartache I can't use

I hate to admit the talk is true
my past is getting warmer while yours is growing old

someone new is crying in the most familiar way
I didn't do one wrong thing to you

It Follows

Resentment starts to go backwards in search of a new hermeneutic
the appointment slipped your mind that's no excuse

I'm the kind who'll sit in the waiting room and watch the second hand
for as long as it takes it's something I'm proud of I won't

leave just because it's dark outside and the street is slick with tears
it's impolite to tell you what you know already

and antisocial not to — I'll bounce back in a year or two
sorry there's no one on your side you'll have to take mine

no need to write that down I'll feel like a brute and it'll only fester
then we'll both be on our knees mewling and puking

it's the voice of a thousand gardens making me cranky and out of sorts
quit your dimwit hankering and hollering I don't want to hear it

Where Was I

High speed trains aren't meant for looking:
if you try to solve the blur you'll get a headache.
Masks are popular if you're feeling infectious
or prophylactically alert.
Sit back and practise mind-control instead,
turning the pages of a cartoon novel.
This one has pictures of lunch boxes emulating
regions and seasons, ingenious snacks
sold on certain days at certain stations.
Don't try to escape allegory
or over-read the vending machines.
You'll regret it later, and you'll miss a lot:
pre-mixed cocktails, blood-type fortunes,
bandaged schoolgirls shitting on Teacher.

DAVID MCCOMB

1962 – 1999

David Richard McComb (17 February 1962 – 2 February 1999) was an Australian rock musician. He was the singer-songwriter of the Australian band, The Triffids.

David McComb was born in Perth, Australia on 17 February 1962, the youngest of four boys. His parents were both doctors, his father, Dr Harold McComb, a prominent plastic surgeon and his mother, Dr Athel Hockey (AO), a renowned geneticist. The family resided in a historical residence, The Cliffe in McNeil Street, Peppermint Grove. All the boys attended Christ Church Grammar School in Claremont, Western Australia, with David winning prizes in English Literature and Divinity. McComb studied journalism and literature at the Western Australian Institute of Technology. His older brother, Robert McComb, later joined The Triffids as a guitarist.

Whilst still at high school, partly in response to the emergence of punk rock, McComb and Alan "Alsy" MacDonald formed Dalsy (a multimedia project, producing music, books and photographic work, and its output reflected his early interests, in Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, the Velvet Underground and Patti Smith), in 1976. Dalsy, later known as Blök Music then evolved into The Triffids (from the post-apocalyptic John Wyndham novel, *The Day of the Triffids*). McComb and MacDonald wrote and performed songs with Phil Kakulas (later in Blackeyed Susans), Andrew McGowan, Julian Douglas-Smith, and later Byron Sinclair, Will Akers and Margaret Gillard. By Christmas 1978, they had released several home-recorded cassette tapes and been through many line-up changes. McComb became established as the band's main songwriter and common denominator in the band's various line-ups.

In 1980, The Triffids won a band demo competition and released their first 7-inch vinyl single, "Stand Up", on the Shake Some Action label in the following year. The Triffids then moved to Melbourne before eventually settling in Sydney in 1982. After a couple of singles and EPs, *Reverie* EP, "Spanish Blue", and the *Bad Timing and Other Stories* EP, the group had saved up money from support slots with the Hoodoo Gurus, The Church and Hunters and Collectors, to record and release the band's debut 12-inch vinyl album, *Treeless Plain*, for Hot Records, a Sydney independent label.

McComb sold the rights to three songs to ABC-TV, for their 1984 series *Sweet and Sour*: "On The Street Where You Live", "Digging a Hole", and "Too Hot To Move". Lead vocals on the first two were sung for the series by Cathy McQuade (of Deckchairs Overboard) and the latter was performed by Deborah Conway (of Do-Ré-Mi). As part of the sale, The Triffids were no longer able to perform the songs. McComb later said that he regretted selling the songs and that he had bought back "Too Hot to Move", which The Triffids began to perform again: they recorded it for their 1989 album, *The Black Swan*. It has also been performed by The Blackeyed Susans (with Rob Snarski on lead vocals).

In 1985, The Triffids moved to London, with the addition of 'Evil' Graham Lee on pedal steel guitar, recorded their second album, *Born Sandy Devotional* in 1986, and *Wide Open Road* EP. The group were hailed by the British media, were featured on the John Peel show and supported Echo & the Bunnymen.

In 1986, with delays in releasing *Born Sandy Devotional*, the Triffids returned to Western Australia where they built an eight-track machine inside a shearing shed on the McComb family's farming property and recorded their third album *In The Pines*. On their return to the UK, they signed a three-record deal with Island Records. In 1987 armed with the considerable budget of £125,000, and the production skills of Gil Norton, David McComb and a new recruit, Adam Peters, concocted the lush orchestrations of the poignant "Bury Me Deep in Love" and the melancholic wide-screen atmosphere of the subsequent *Calenture* album. Despite the release of another two tracks from the album as singles, "Trick of the Light" and "Holy Water", *Calenture* didn't have the impact expected of it. In 1989, the "Goodbye Little Boy" single featured in the Australian soap opera *Neighbours*. 1989 also saw the Triffids record their last studio album, *The Black Swan*, in England, with producer Stephen Street. Despite being well received, the album wasn't an overwhelming success, which disappointed McComb and the rest of the band to the point where they decided to dissolve the band. In order to fulfill their contractual obligations with Island Records a live album recorded in Stockholm, Stockholm was released in 1990 the year after the Triffids split up.

McComb lived in London in 1990-1992 with his girlfriend, and launched a solo career. In 1991, McComb and Adam Peters contributed to the Leonard Cohen tribute album *I'm Your Fan* with a cover of "Don't Go Home With Your Hard-On", later mentioned favorably by Cohen himself.

When he returned to Australia, McComb settled in Melbourne, where he commenced studies at the University of Melbourne in art history. He recorded with the Blackeyed Susans, completed a solo album, *Love of Will*, for Mushroom Records, and undertook a solo tour of Europe with his backing band, The Red Ponies, consisting of Graham Lee, Warren Ellis, Peter Luscombe, Bruce Haymes and Michael Vidale. In June 1993 three former members of The Triffids: McComb, Robert and Lee; as well as Charlie Owen and Chris Wilson guested on Acuff's Rose's debut studio album, *Never Comin' Down*.

He also performed in Australia with his last band, Costar, who recorded a three-track EP. (This has never been released, but may be released on the W.Minc label when the Triffids reissue program is complete.) Recording for a Costar album was also underway at the time of McComb's death. McComb made occasional appearances with the Blackeyed Susans in Australia, giving Rob Snarski a break from vocals (as did Kim Salmon).

McComb suffered from back pain which worsened over the years. He also struggled with alcoholism, and amphetamine and heroin abuse, which greatly affected his health. He developed cardiomyopathy, a heart condition that, when found in young men, is most commonly caused by alcoholism. In 1996, he underwent a successful heart transplant, but continued his drinking and drug use. In January 1999 he was driving a car which was involved in a collision. He was hospitalised overnight and released with bruising. A few days later he died at home, on 2 February 1999 just before his 37th birthday. In February 2000, after the State Coroner of Victoria finally published his findings, The West Australian newspaper wrote: "Mr Johnstone [the Coroner] said McComb's mental and physical condition had deteriorated after his accident but his death was due to heroin toxicity and mild acute rejection of his 1996 heart transplant."

His ashes were spread under the pines at the family farm (Woodstock) at Jerdacuttup, approximately 22 km north of Hopetoun, Western Australia.

In 2001 the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA), as part of its 75th Anniversary celebrations, named his 1986 composition "Wide Open Road" as

one of the thirty greatest Australian songs of all time.

On 21 February 2006 David McComb was posthumously inducted into the West Australian Music Industry Association Hall Of Fame, as a composer.

In June 2006, his work with The Triffids was reissued in remastered and extended form on the Domino label, commencing with *Born Sandy Devotional*. McComb's work is held in high regard in Europe, to the extent that The Triffids reformed and travelled from Australia to play live performances in Belgium and The Netherlands, in July 2006, with guest vocalists replacing McComb. The band also played four consecutive nights in Sydney in January 2008 with many guest singers and musicians, including Mick Harvey, Rob Snarski and Melanie Oxley. These performances were released as a DVD ('It's Raining Pleasure') in late 2009.

In September 2009, "Vagabond Holes: David McComb & The Triffids" - edited by Chris Coughran and Niall Lucy, and featuring contributions from Nick Cave, DBC Pierre, Laurie Duggan, John Kinsella, Bleddyn Butcher, Steve Kilbey, Robert Forster, "Handsome" Steve Miller and others - was published by Fremantle Press.

A feature length biopic entitled *Love in Bright Landscapes* (working title only), commenced shooting in January 2008. It is being produced by Melbourne based Tornado Alley Productions. In late 2009, a live tribute album entitled *Deep in a Dream: An Evening with the Songs of David McComb*, featuring The Blackeyed Susans and other Melbourne based acts, was issued by the filmmakers to help fund the ongoing production of the documentary.

In 2009 a collection of David McComb's poems, titled *Beautiful Waste: Poems by David McComb*, was published by Fremantle Press. The anthology was edited by Chris Coughran and Niall Lucy, and includes an introduction by poet John Kinsella.

Beautiful Waste: The Poetry of David McComb

Robert Forster

David McComb, who passed away in 1999 at the age of 36, was the lead singer and songwriter of The Triffids. The band began their career in Perth in the late 1970s and broke up in 1989, and although McComb released a solo album, *Love of Will*, in 1994, and wrote and played with other musicians over the years, it is his first group that made him his reputation. The ripple that goes out from great art – especially when it is undervalued in its time – has a tendency to grow and spread, and this has been the case with the music of The Triffids. Now, 10 years after McComb's death, two books appear from Fremantle Press. *Vagabond Holes: David McComb & The Triffids* is a collection of reminiscences and essays – filled with good intentions but not always good writing. Far better, and far more unexpected, is the arrival of a collection of poetry from David McComb entitled *Beautiful Waste*.

The back-cover blurb on *Beautiful Waste* reads:

... he left behind an extraordinary body of work, notably the songs and albums he recorded with Australian post-punk group The Triffids. The fact that McComb also wrote poetry from an early age – much of it collected here for the first time – will

come as no surprise to admirers of the songwriter's powerfully evocative lyrics.

The first sentence is true, but the second sentence I would contest. Some would say that I have “an extraordinary body of work” behind me, “albums and songs” recorded with the band I was in – The Go-Betweens. But I don’t have any poetry. Does Ed Kuepper have a drawer-full? I doubt it. Where’s Nick Cave’s poetry? I knew David McComb, but I didn’t know he wrote outside his songs. So I find it a surprise, a wonderful surprise, to have these poems – because not everyone who writes “powerfully evocative lyrics” writes poetry, and those that do have to be very good indeed to match the McComb of *Beautiful Waste*.

The first impression the 60 poems make is of an assuredness of poetic form. This is not rock-star dabbling; this is fine-cut poetry that, even before consideration of content begins, forces an admiration of shape, the fine use of punctuation, the skilful slicing and phrasing of the lines: the hundred tricks and techniques that any established poet might deploy. So this is serious poetry on the criterion of appearance alone. The thrill comes, the kick, from the power that McComb has put into the discipline of form. For the poems aren’t gentle or extended ruminations that can be aligned to his lyrics: McComb valued poetry more than that, and has used it as a repository for human feeling beyond what he could express in song. Many of the poems shock: the big obsessions, such as distrust of love, the disappointment and weight of life, the estrangement and displacement that run through all of McComb’s music, are here, but intensified and distilled; it makes for some very powerful poetry.

McComb left no definitive sequence, so the editors have grouped the poems into five sections according to “loosely shared themes or objects”. Any rough listing that McComb made usually began with the poem ‘Prayer for One’, and it starts *Beautiful Waste*. It contains some of the most quotable lines on love in the book, delivered in an eerie voice from beyond the grave that spooks this and other poems with its air of calm prophecy. “Find warmth in the mornings / without me” and “We’re long apart now” – these lines suggest a former lover is being addressed, and that comfort and consolation are being given, but the magnanimity of the gestures and the glory and sacrifice are almost flirtatious. ‘Beautiful Era’, the last poem in the first section, is the twin of ‘Prayer for One’, but this time more sensual – “There’s a whole majestic realm and kingdom / in this bedroom of ours” – and with a rare upbeat ending. In between, though, McComb is in trouble: there are drugs in the second poem, soured love in the third, jealousy in the fourth, and the fifth begins with, “Life is not a Christmas Tree / The angel is rarely on top.” The language and luxuriant images always impress, and ‘Prayer for One’ and ‘Beautiful Era’ run deeper than any love song he ever wrote.

After the wild start, the second shorter section with its more wistful tone comes as a respite. ‘The Mistake of Returning’ has two long stanzas, the first setting up the expectations of the return: “I followed old paths / against the din of sleep, / amidst the aching beauty / of familiar streets.” The second sees them dashed, and so much hope gets dashed in the book, to be taken with a shrug or bitter self-recrimination. This time the spoiler is the darkest shadow hanging over McComb – his health: “Soon I was short of breath / in the thin night air”. Two poems later is the pitch-perfect, don’t-change-a-word wonder of ‘Grace Descends’; any need for further convincing of the merits of McComb the poet ends here. A 20-line poem, with one strategically placed semi-colon, it could be about death, the moment of our dying,

or about sleep, and 'Grace' could just be grace. And then it starts again.

Section three is the nightmare, where self-hate, B-grade movie scenarios, weirdness, a love poem called 'to MY DARLING PIG, impaled on love' meet; before a real boil-over into a five-page rampage that includes 'My List of Amputations' ("I cut off my penis / to drain myself of any ill-feeling"), 'Withdrawal' ("I kill you, brother / I rape you, sister / I, your withdrawal"), and 'Love Sires a Killer'. What does it all mean? There is a David Lynch aspect to this: the film-maker who has thrown a lot of craziness onto the screen but has lived as a calm, gentle, meditation-loving person. Not that the split in McComb is so wide, but the camera in these poems zooms past the cars and trees and rolling hills into the cracks and molecules of bedroom walls, incisions in a woman's back, sores and scratches in need of the healing sun and salt water. Some of it is Perth noir, with wild night-time fantasies of escape and crime, and some is *Blue Velvet*, with McComb as the handsome hero finding a chopped-off ear in the dirt, sex an ambiguous game, villains sucking oxygen tanks, all to a soundtrack of Roy Orbison. Add the fact that McComb had a heart transplant in his thirties, and that both his parents were doctors, and these blistered poems of flesh may just start to swim into focus.

One poem, in particular, calls out for attention in this grim sequence. It's called 'The Clean Slate' and has McComb working as an orderly in a "prison sick bay": perhaps it's a metaphor for McComb as poet, as sufferer from bad health, as carer for and victim of his own self, with "the clean slate" as his art, his poetry or a place of grace he searches for. It's an odd but very compelling poem that near its conclusion reaches a key line in the book. The prisoner whom McComb has to shave and "pump full of juice" has the cheap prison-flick name of "Moose", and as the portrait is built up of this murderer – "Men like him / carry blind hatred heavy in their shoes" – the description starts to resemble an outline of McComb himself. The passage on Moose climaxes with: "And, sure, I respect a man for trying / to unload his rotten throbbing pack; / But it's no use! We're born this way, / well-loved but underdone". The "rotten throbbing pack" is a great image for the past, or for the stuff of poetry. It's the last line that hits hardest, though: "well-loved" must be family and friends, but what is "but underdone"? An unpreparedness for life? Unprepared for love? Sexual love? It's to do with disappointment, and resignation to loss, and the fact that things aren't just going to turn out right. And it seems that McComb believed this: you have to be ready and tough, and he wasn't.

From here the poetry and vision cools again, although great lines are forever accumulating: "Saltwater dripping from a woman's bare shoulders / is smelt thirty metres downwind" or "singlets twang with the / sweaty discharge of male toil" – isn't twang just the right word? But at the same time, deep in the fourth section of the book, there is "I don't care much any longer, let me be blown away". A weariness at life, a listlessness of mood creeps in, and the complaint is "the tiredness and pain". Sometimes the scenes are a little overcooked – "I picked up Jesus in my car last night / I asked him how far he was going" – but given where McComb is headed, this can be forgiven. 'Dénouement', the third-last poem in the final section, suddenly snaps with its title and its rhyming couplets. A late classicism arrives with this and the last poem, 'Good Evening Dear Miss Alach'. It is heartbreaking stuff, as if everything before was a mad dream, with its wild scenes and free-floating verse. Now, at the end, McComb hitches the shock of final truths to the surprise of crisp nineteenth-century-tinged verse. 'Dénouement' is sad and the most conventionally autobiographical poem in the collection: "I sang long and loud into the night / of my broken bleeding heart". And 'Good Evening ... ' ends

fittingly with McComb in love, light, and as funny and stylish as he could be.

That these poems exist is one surprise; the far bigger one is their subject matter and quality. McComb's lyrics operated on one level; the poems sink mineshafts and go down further. He's laid bare, and perhaps the hesitation he showed in his life about their publication – "'Rock Star Publishes Slim Volume of Poetry' has such a shitty ring to it," he once said – may have to do with the sense of self-exposure, and the hurt they may have given to those close to him – those "well-loved". *Beautiful Waste* is the perfect McComb title: wry, self-deprecating, with a touch of futility – but always beautiful.

Wide Open Road

Well the drums rolled off in my forehead
And the guns went off in my chest,
Remember carrying the baby just for you
Crying in the wilderness.

I lost track of my friends, I lost my kin,
I cut them off as limbs,
I drove out over the flatlands
Hunting down you and him.

The sky was big and empty,
My chest filled to explode,
I yelled my insides out at the sun
At the wide open road!

It's a wide open road, it's a wide open road.....

How do you think it feels
Sleeping by yourself,
When the one you love, the one you love
Is with someone else?

Then it's a wide open road,
It's a wide open road,
And now you can go any place
That you ever wanted to go.

I wake up in the morning,
Thinking I'm still by your side,
I reach out just to touch you
Then I realise
It's a wide open road,
It's a wide open road.

Tender is the Night (The Long Fidelity)

I knew him as a gentle young man,
I cannot say for sure the reasons for his decline.
We watched him fade before our very eyes
And years before his time.

Surrounded himself with shiny things,
First night tickets, ermine, pearls upon a string,
And disappeared in all the pestilence
That sudden pleasure brings.

He never asks after her anymore,
He made a point of losing her address,
And every trinket that she ever touched
He keeps locked away,
And just burns up in the furnace of his chest.

Well I spoke to a man who says he's done it all
And the only thing that pleases or excites him now
Is hurting, hurting then hurting some more!
There's someone I want to forget tonight,
Don't you want to forget someone too?
I left him, and I can leave you too!

Baby let's go out tonight,
It will all turn out all right I'm sure.
Don't want to drink at home again tonight
So let's go out,
Let's go out tonight.
It's getting dark earlier now
But where you are, it's just getting light,
Where you are it will just be getting light.

Bury Me Deep In Love

Bury me deep in love,
Bury me deep in love ,
Take me in, under your wing,
Bury me deep in love.

There's a chapel deep in a valley
For travelling strangers in distress ,
It's nestled among the ghosts of the pines
Under the shadow of a precipice.
When a lonesome climbing figure,
Slips and loses grip,
Tumbles into a crevice
To his icy mountain crypt,
Bury him deep in love, bury him deep in love,
Take him in, under your wing,
Bury him deep in love.

When the rock below is shaking,
The heart inside is quaking,
How long this cold dark night is taking,
Bury me deep in love,
Bury me deep in love, bury me deep in love,
Take me in, under your skin,
Bury me deep in love.

And the little congregation gathers,
Prays for guidance from above,
They sing, "Hear our meditation,
Lead us not into temptation
But give us some kind of explanation,
Bury us deep in love!"

You may lose me on the east face,
You may lose me on the west,
I may be covered over in the night,
Bury me deep in your love, yes,
Bury me deep in love, bury me deep in love,
Take me in, hide me under your skin,
Bury me deep in love.

Bury me deep in love, darling bury me deep in your love,
Deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper,
Bury me deep in love.

New Year's Greetings (The Country Widower)

I've got a little place to myself up on Stony Ridge,
I got it made in the shade,
I sleep in the afternoon,
Leave my bed unmade,
No-one breathing down my neck, black coffee and a shave,
I whistle a little of whatever AM radio plays.
As for letters and provisions...
Well it's a long walk to the corner shop,
In the January heat, it's a big decision
To either think of you, or not.

I send you a New Year's Kiss
And I hope you will remember me like this.

I got two good arms, one bent leg,
One weekly social security cheque,
I can make an honest dollar, but to be quite honest
I can't keep track of where it went.
I've got a good black dog, so I don't need a phone,
He can smell bad weather coming in his old dog bones.
I don't need no Eyewitness News, no Seven Eleven,
No Southern Fried Chicken, no Man from Prudential
To give me good times on easy terms,
No Eyewitness News.

And in the evening when the skyline is cut in two
By a figure resembling you,
Wet matches won't light, and I double take,
Wind shudders to a halt, main roads are washed out,
And all around, as far as the night can see
Is just the gaping lack of you and me!

I hear you're riding a new horse in the sun.
Sure hope those Sydney shoeshine boys don't take you for a run!
I still want you back, when it's all said and done.

Let the sky roll back, let the ground give way,
The wind has turned around, the seasons upside down,
To either think of you or not,
To either think of you or not!

Born Sandy Devotional

Born Sandy Devotional,
Such a sweet girl to me!
I'll do what I can now
To love her to dust,
For dust is what we all shall be!

Born Sandy Devotional,
All that I ever knew!
Don't know the wrong of that,
Don't know the good,
Sticks like hot tar to the sole of my shoe.

On yellow hood of her car with salt knots in her hair,
And some cards and some chicken and beer.
We can't mess about
We kiss until...
Kiss until she has to leave.

We're born Sandy Devotional,
All that I ever knew!
Don't know the wrong of that,
Don't know the good,
Both of them ugly, both of them true.

I don't want to hear no gossip or chat,
No Bill or Pete, Kevin or Sam.
They were just poison,
They don't mean a thing,
Burn up in my spit
Like the fat in the pan.

Born Sandy Devotional,
Born under alternate stars.
Born to be Sandy's confessional,
Burning like that to be trapped in her eyes.

We go for a swim
And we wash it all off,
And hope that it leaves us alone.
But with each fresh kiss
Blood wells up again,
Dries on top of skin
And eats into the bone.

Born Sandy Devotional,
Bound for an all sunless star.
Bound to be Sandy's confessional,

Born Sandy Devotional,
Feather and tarred.

Born Sandy Devotional,
Bound for an all godless star.
Headed for trouble, looking for grief,
Born Sandy Devotional,
Feather and tarred,
Yeah, feather and tarred,
Feather and tarred.

Dust is what we all shall be....
Dust is what we all shall be....

Estuary Bed

The children are walking back from the beach,
Sun on the sidewalk is burning their feet,
Washing the salt off under the shower,
And just wasting away, wasting away
The hours and hours and hours.

Come on, climb over your father's back fence,
For the very last time we'll take the shortcut across his lawn
Then lie together on the estuary bed,
Perfectly still, perfectly warm.

Sleep no more,
Sleep is dead,
Sleep no more on the estuary bed.
Ache no more,
Old skin is shed,
Sleep no more on the estuary bed.

I see you still,
I know not rest,
Silt returns along the passage of flesh.
I hear your voice,
I taste the salt,
I bear the stain, it won't wash off.
I hold you not
But I see you still,
What use eyesight if it should melt?
What use memory covered in estuary silt?

I know your shape,
Our limbs entwined,
I know your name, remember mine.

Sleep no more,
Sleep is dead,
Sleep no more on the estuary bed.
Ache no more,
Old skin is shed,
Sleep no more on the estuary bed.

Seabirds (The)

No foreign pair of dark sunglasses
will ever shield you from
the light that pierces your eyelids,
the screaming of the gulls,
feeding off the bodies of the fish,
thrashing up the bay till it was red,
turning the sky a cold dark colour
as they circled overhead.

He swam out to the edge of the reef,
there were cuts across his skin,
saltwater on his eyes and arms,
but he could not feel the sting.
There was no one left to hold him back,
no one to call out his name,
dress him feed him drive him home,
say "Little boy it doesn't have to end this way!"

He announced their trial separation
and spent the night in a Park Beach Motel bed,
a total stranger lying next to him,
rain hitting the roof hard over his head.
She said "What's the matter now lover boy?
Has the cat run off with your tongue?
Are you drinking to get maudlin
or drinking to get numb?"

He called out to the seabirds "Take me now,
I'm no longer afraid to die!"
But they pretended not to hear him
and just watched him with their hard and bright black eyes.
They could pick the eye from any dying thing
that lay within their reach,
but they would not touch the solitary figure
lying tossed up on the beach.

Everything You Touch Turns To Time

Saying yes to everything,
Turning down nothing,
You forget about the joy true love brings,
You get to itching for the devil's next love thing.

The time has come
To look yourself in the face
When everything around you moves fast
And dissolves into air.

What do you care?
You've forgotten the face
And look at the time!
Isn't it time?
Jesus, isn't it high time?

You're afraid of life,
You're human, all too human.
I can understand that,
Honey I couldn't live like that.

Everytime you plead to God,
You twist yourself a little more inside.
You're saying yes to everything,
And everything you touch turns to time,
Everything you touch turns to time.
And the years they roll on by,
And the years they roll on by,
In the end don't add up to much,
In the end don't add up to much.

Now the time has come
To look yourself in the face,
When everything around you moves fast
And dissolves into air.
What do you care?
You've forgotten the time!
Saying yes to everything,
Turning down nothing,
You're saying yes to everything,
And everything you touch turns to time.
You're a king and everything you touch
Turns to time,
Everything you touch turns to time!
And it's time, please, gentlemen, time!
And it's time that you came home.
And it's time that you came home.

Time on your hands,
Time to kill!
Time on your hands,
Time to kill!
Everything you touch just turns to time,
Everything you touch just turns to time.

ALISON CROGGON

b. 1962

Alison Croggon was born in Carlton, Transvaal, South Africa, in 1962. With her family she moved to England in 1966, and to Australia in 1969. She grew up near Ballarat in Victoria, and subsequently moved to Melbourne, where she still lives. Croggon has pursued a multi-faceted literary career, writing fiction, drama and opera libretti, literary and dramatic criticism, and poetry. Her first novel *Navigato* (1996) was commended in the Australian/Vogel Literary Award, and she has since written a series of fantasy novels, *The Books of Pellinor* (2002–2008). She is the Melbourne theatre critic for *The Australian* newspaper, and keeps a weblog of dramatic criticism, *Theatre Notes*. During the 1990s she was poetry editor for *Overland Extra* (1992), *Modern Writing* (1992–1994), and *Voices* (1996), and she established the literary E-zine *Masthead*, which she continues to edit.

Croggon's first poetry collection, *This is the Stone*, was published in 1991 in a combined edition with Fiona Perry's collection *Pharoahs Returning*. *This is the Stone* attracted significant critical attention for a first collection, and won both the FAW Anne Elder Poetry Award and the ASAL Mary Gilmore Award. She has since published eight further collections, including a volume of new and selected work, *The Common Flesh*. She has frequently embarked on reading tours in the UK and USA, and in 2000 was the Australia Council Writer-in-Residence at Pembroke College, Cambridge University.

Beginning Again

For example, the way that tree. There's a bird in it that sounds like a burglar alarm.

Were you really there, or someone else?

The bird, the tree. The light on a particular building, at noon, with the sky behind it. A stone pavement in the rain.

For example. How it hurts to say that word, *my*. Or *mine*. Or *I*.

You are walking along a pavement and close beside the pavement are cars, they seem to be travelling too fast. All they can see is walls, the walls of buildings, embankments, gardens. The road is wet. And it happens that you must cross this road. There are too many cars, and it is wet, and it is becoming dark, and although you can see the other side of the road, you cannot cross. Yet all these people in all these cars are travelling fast, as if they can see through the walls to something else. A bicycle? A dog?

For example. The river. It is brown, it is narrow, it is green, its banks are stone, it is black, it is choked with weed, it is wide, a stone bridge curves over it, or a single tarmac path fenced with cyclone wire, glistening in the moonlight. No matter, there is a river. It is a river made of water, like all other rivers. It runs towards the sea.

When you place your elbows on the bridge, you look into the water.

The light on the water. Some bounces back to your eyes, some breaks itself on the surfaces of waves. Some pierces the surface and sends brown shafts down into the body of the river. You look at the light.

The light is a different colour. You are used to the light shifting from morning to night. You are used to the yellow of the sunlight on the wall in the evening and the wide white light of morning. You know how the shadow falls from a pencil. But this light is a

different colour. It is one of the colours of water, as if the air was made of water.

It might begin like that.

Attempts at Being

i
inexplicable fire

surges flame into flame its blue
whip trawling deeps of skin
for tongues lit
to nerveflash

throat after throat
claws to its coronal

ii
brief spring tempests

a single drop
at twigtip
glanced by sun
to eyebright

muteness
breathing in

a kind of song
crude enough
for ears to see
clearly

iii
neither too far nor too within
nor too immense nor too intangible

grass that smells
of human damp
where lovers were

magnolia
agitated by the thrust
of a small bird

the globe trembling
through its gravid course

neurones quick with
such music
as shakes out angels

Breath steams across chilled fields

breath steams across chilled fields
where foxes prop and wait like nostalgia

there was a face, there was an absence
and the sun gathered in its appointments

the crickets continue to threaten each other
under its shroud of grass the earth turns over

birds tuck their swiftness beneath eyelids
o for the skin of rain that hides them from night

hushing the dread that stutters my heart
the tightening silence

Language

This of course has nothing to do with words which
may be hammered into atoms or dressed in tulle
whatever you like they will do what you say
obediently, biding their time.
They'll outlast you anyway.

How to bud into this world that makes you so lonely.
How to become pitiless enough
to see one singular thing.
How to murder the god in yourself
in order to discover an absence
you might believe in —
those sorts of questions —

and how the grammar of love
depends on the spaces and
those several others
who continually insist on the sky
and today it really is blue and white
and closer than any language.

EMMA LEW

b. 1962

With a gift for giving the moment, Emma Lew is a Melbourne-based poet whose first poetry collection, *The Wild Reply*, won the Mary Gilmore Award and was the joint winner of the 1997 Age Poetry Book of the Year Award. Her poetry collection *Anything the Landlord Touches* was shortlisted for the 2003 NSW Premier's Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry and the Age Book of the Year Award for Poetry, and has won both the Judith Wright Calanthe Poetry Prize, and the Victorian Premier's C.J.Dennis Prize for Poetry.

Dramatic certainly, but Lew's poetry is perhaps most remarkable for its containment, its intensification, and its ability to evoke the ferment and fury of history and consciousness in their processes of reaction and revolution – through the isolation of a speaker's voice, often in the form of interior monologues carved back to poetry. Her poems are deftly conceived and skillfully rendered artifacts. In a working note she comments:

*What I try for in my poems is an effect similar to an experience I had years ago while visiting a touring exhibition of American Pop Art. I was standing up close in front of a painting of a long, low building that was rising out of a background of lurid yellow-green. The style was unfamiliar among the Warhols and Oldenburgs, so I wasn't giving it careful attention. But I remember being jolted out of my numb gaze when I noticed a small patch of flame and smoke over on the far right-hand side of the roof. This serene, unassuming building was actually on fire – the horror and absurdity of it! An instant of tremendous surprise and disorientation, at once disturbing and thrilling; a feeling of being violently reawoken that was delicious and compelling. (From *How2*)*

A part of the disorientation and thrill of Lew's work comes from her displacement of the lyrical self outside the contemporary, or the appropriation of aberrant selves in the contemporary (such as in 'Prey'). Lew mines history and draws forth the spirit of times past, giving voice to an often historically premised confessional poetry (that is, she starts outside the self, depicting a time as much as a self). Her scrutiny of other selves and their place in a past history is at once slightly cold – she has an extraordinary gift for detachment and observation – and also given to the living warmth, sometimes flesh and blood, of her subjects, the peculiar tics and insights that make up a consciousness. Often these voices, carved out of another time, catch on shadows in our time. An example of this might be in the brilliant poem 'Red' where, drawing on the Russian Revolution, the reader faces a saboteur, more anarchist than revolutionary, the presumed violence of which might be disturbingly familiar to contemporary audiences.

*we came and we came and we left our machines
at night, and everywhere hidden wires had only
to be touched. Class hatred had then just dawned.
Cables of denial sped. I remember how the tolling
of a bell would flood, the insurrection surely
cutting my face. Some high official was thrown*

*into the river, and this became the meshing
of the wheels, and when lightning struck that part
of the old palace, all the theatres were deceived,
or deceived themselves. We were the hired
and the depraved, thin and dark and unjust,
prepared to burst in that ray of light when it came*

It is not so much that Lew inhabits other voices, but that they come to inhabit, breathe and indeed speak through her poetry. At a time when so much of Australian poetry might be divided between the experiential and experimental, the lyrical and the textual, Lew's work stands out as an invigorating and extremely profitable engagement with something other than self, literature or language. She explores the recesses of times past and the peculiar, often violent genie of the contemporary, creating a range of haunting voices and narratives.

The lessons of history aside, Lew's work is also very simply a great pleasure to read. Elsewhere, in more immediately lyrical works, she combines a powerful gift for suggestion with an ability to cultivate and capitalize on the jarring effect of perception entering consciousness:

*Concepts of need are awash in oil dollars,
hoax callers are jamming the emergency lines,
and the fireworks were my only pleasure all year.
This gesture of putting my hand to my eye
alerts the world that I'm still alive.
(‘Goodbye to Maybe’)*

The entry into language, or language itself, is not privileged at the cost of the evocation of a consciousness unfolding in surprising and humorous ways.

Lew's gift for the dramatic voice is captivating. She has a keen ear for the sonority of interiority and history alike, as for the exorbitance and strangeness of the autonomous voice (the interiority of the monological, its alogic) that carries over into her more immediately experiential poetry, merging with an at times surrealistic ease in disorientation and surprise, so that at each moment the world, be it of history or self, is given back to the reader wholly new and mesmerising.

A criticism of her methodology was made by Patrick McCauley:

What has not been mentioned is Lew's methodology which is a post modern version of William Burroughs's 'cut up' method. That is, she takes lines from everywhere (other poets; novels, advertising, graffiti, newspaper articles etc etc) then slots the lines together, works them a bit, and bingo, a poem. It is therefore not surprising that the poems appear to be made up of a pile of good 'one liners' but lacking in syntax, first hand experience, and vision.

Her response was illuminating:

The implication that what I do amounts to throwing together random fragments and then passing it off as poetry is false. Yes, I often use lines and phrases from a range of sources, but only as a starting point. Everything I use I work and rework, usually taking weeks to create what, for me, is a coherent poem with the sense and mood I'm trying to convey. There's no "bingo" about it. The final draft would rarely contain even one line or phrase from the original.

Rose Constructions

Sometimes my teacher
changes her conduct strangely,
pressing her heart
like dead leaves.
She sleeps in the chapel,
which is haunted.
Already the shadows
write in her diary.

She burns the letters
silently, reverently.
Like a bride,
she pushes away her plate.
She reads to me
like a will-o'-the-wisp
and I ask her
if there are bitter drops
in everyone's cup.

She says, 'I respond
to the ploughing
of the fields
whereas a man
grows fainter by a love.'
All the things
we talk about
I sew into the seams.
She opens the window
and lets in the dark flowers.

Red

we came and we came and we left our machines
at night, and everywhere hidden wires had only
to be touched. Class hatred had then just dawned.
Cables of denial sped. I remember how the tolling
of a bell would flood, the insurrection surely
cutting my face. Some high official was thrown
into the river, and this became the meshing
of the wheels, and when lightning struck that part
of the old palace, all the theatres were deceived,
or deceived themselves. We were the hired
and the depraved, thin and dark and unjust,
prepared to burst in that ray of light when it came

Prey

I was daydreaming about wiping out the whole school
I was rehearsing and perfecting the 'gentle giant' approach
Rebellious and defiant, had no ambition
Death is a beginning, it's beautiful

I swore I never shot at a windowless wall
I was calm and denied, and was allowed to drive away
And killed a young bride, inconclusively
It's sad, but I don't live there any more

Not like you'd expect - real dark, red blood
Humid in the city known for its beer
I was wrestling with a list, perhaps posing as a cop
And I wrapped my fingers around your throat. Did you panic?

I'm not an expert, I don't know the terminology
They were looking for a guy who was ghoulish or foamed
It's a slow road with a lot of curves
Maybe I should have toyed with her more

Riot Eve

I haven't, thank God, become a perpetrator.
I never caused the death of others, though I must utter these words.
I hold myself back, as the shrewd son of my father.
I see it like this: a lion will attack a gazelle.

We have one life. Why spend it being feebly decent?
We see but one night; we contain others.
I ask myself if this path and all those terrible detours were really necessary.
There is a reason for everything, and our catastrophe.

Imagine then that a father returns and doesn't speak about any of this.
He carries me on his shoulders during the long walk in the forest.
Imagine a man - so polite, so clean;
his swiftess, his warmth, his murderous ideas.

Look, nothing in this world is perfect.
This is the condition, now growing darker.
History has shown us: the Black Death, the Borgias...
I await the real wooden anger that shapes me.

The gardens have roared for days.
The wind bends the trees. It is like a sign.
I hear of a palace rising.
It is just after midnight, and I will obey you.

MTC CRONIN

b. 1963

MTC Cronin has published six books and three booklets of poetry, the most recent being *beautiful, unfinished ~ PARABLE/SONG/CANTO/POEM* (Salt Publishing, UK, 2003). Her *Talking to Neruda's Question* published in 2001 by Vagabond Press, is being translated into Spanish by the poet, Juan Garrido Salgado, and a collection of her work is being translated into Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian by Tatjana Lukic. She is currently working on her doctorate, *The Law of Love Letters ~ Prose, Poems, Law & Desire*, at UTS. Her next book, *<I – 100>*, will be published in September 2004 (Shearsman Press, UK) and another collection is due out in the United States in 2005.

Margie Cronin is perhaps the most prolific and consistent of the generation of Australian poets to emerge during the 1990s. Her work is marked by an earthy relationship to the body poetic and politic. Poised, intelligent and sensual, there is an overall fecundity to her use of image to dislodge and derail statement into new unseen but intensely imagined territory, allowing well-balanced statement to gestate and gesture toward the surreal and absurdly true in a way that seems more attuned to European influences, such as the Slovenian poet Tomaz Salamun or, at Cronin's more contained, Polish Nobel prize winner Wislawa Szymborska, than Australian influences. At the same time, her constant attention to the political through the poetic and her visceral relationship to both world and word, brings to mind the great Pablo Neruda. It is perhaps no surprise to find amongst her prodigious output of work one collection that responds directly to Neruda, 'talking to' rather than presuming to answer Neruda's last work, *The Book of Questions*. It is a tribute to Cronin's skills as a poet that, rather than end as simply derivative or arrogant, she is able to create new and distinctive poetry from such direct engagements with poetry's greats.

Cronin's work is marked by humour and compassion for the darker histories spun by the twentieth century. In 'Death of a Million', Cronin unwinds a catalogue of death and amnesia from the death of an unnamed "young princess" across the back of Stalin's famous comment, "A single death is a tragedy/ a million deaths is a statistic." Equally crueling the humour and the reader's understanding of the moral worth of modern day (tabloid) fairy tales and their bad, conspiracy theory endings, 'Death of a Million' shows Cronin at her hot-blooded best, weighing irony down with the weight and effervescence of the contemporary.

Cronin's work is something of a delta. The scope of her reading into modern poetry is impressive and apprehensible in each of her collections. More often than not, her poetry takes part in a heated and enlightening discussion with a swathe of poets and poetries from Celan to Rumi, from Rilke to Whitman, from Akhmatova to Lorca, among numerous and numinous others. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this conversation is that at her best Cronin is not lost among nor overpowered by her interlocutors but enters the international community she gathers together with a fierce and unique voice.

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Seven Mysterious Songs

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS I

BELONGING

for P.B.

‘I am looking for sunlight’

I saw your world begin
A night of dawns
Time kept coming round to that
Our reception of the light
The silence of the sun
As it crept spectacularly
Towards us

When I saw how it revealed you
My own paths curved
To find the circle
They had once been

Words here are simply sighs
The hums and satisfactions of animals
Click in the back of my throat
That might be the cricket or cicada
In Summer ventriloquy
Or the snake becoming new
Over the friendly rock

It has become simple for me
To think of these things now
That the idea of the fragment
Has given its secrets
To the whole

The leaves which feared separation
Fell
And the water telling and retelling
Itself passes by the place of this event
Only to pass again
The sky with that big voice saved
For the moments its own story is known
Whispers
The earth:

Come on little bird
The trees are holding you up
Come possum
With your hearty feet leaving prints

On the porcelain roofs of dreams
Come grains
And mountains, lakes, orchards
Leave your importance
And follow these clouds
To where they have no meaning

Turtle
Are you coming
With your knowledge of origins and regret?
Children, bring the hearts
Of forests
And the abilities of the sand

We'll walk over that hill
Where the path curves out of sight
Do not rush
It is not the future ahead of us
But a slow becoming
Time weaves itself
Into the very swing of your arms
That space left
Where you lift your foot

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS II

LONELINESS

Where am I going with this pain
Marvellous for a lot of things
– for climbing walls
– and crawling scalps
– for leaving the moment
out of pure desperation
But with my mind packed up,
where do I go?

to a church?
No the church is full of glassblowers
this pain is not fragile enough
for their pursed lips to blow

to a butcher?
No there they have red hands
this pain is too raw and lonely
for their sharp blades to cleave

to the town hall?
No the town hall echoes with excuses
this pain is too forgetful of its host
for apologies

So I took it to a bridge
And half way out –
with the prospect of somewhere to go –
that crazy pain jumped!
And I went in after it
believing that even this death
should not go
uncompanied

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS III

SLEEP

Half the Shadowed World

Sleep, like peaches
fallen to the ground
(hand pressed to the

cheek), boot-bruised
side cannot feel.
Juice in the earth.

Shadow of a Unicorn

This horse on its knees
in the field
Pretending to be a unicorn
As horses play and imagine
Another day
A night
Black trees . . .

The horse on its feet
has grown a horn and saddle
Imagines the voice
Of a rider:
Those far hills
Are simply shadows
Of these you stand on . . .

The Doorweb

Listen at the keyhole of light.
The doorweb.
Shimmering across.
Shimmering like a cocked horse.
Ready to fire.

Hot hooves are on my head tonight.
The room's flat and dark as ears.
On the roof the cumquat tree.
Offering sweet peel to the moon.

My bed.
Is filled up with time.

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS IV

CONTRAPOSITION

sun & rain

‘What is there here but weather, what spirit
Have I except it comes from the sun?’

I have grown my wisdom
on summer days

and watered it with both rain
and melting snow

I have helped it
up ladders

and sat with it
still upon a tired step

I have tasted it like a bite
of fruit and unlike fruit

savoured that same bite
over and over

I have moved it
within my arms

and of nights cried for it
to leave me sleeping

and then dreamed it
to take a different form

something now unknown
and not like any shape

I have whispered or word
I ran my hands about

I was shocked but don't know why
I should have been

when I looked in a mirror
painted over

and I let my wisdom die
with the relaxing cells

that slow upon my body
and quickly fall aside

I use it to discard myself well
in the world

and when the world
is not mine

I will have no need
of the glorious shelter it will erect

in the place where that which
has sheltered me now stands

in the end I will sit down
without it

and know nothing
of the weather

sun & rain 2

Are sun and rain narratives
that focus on collective experience
or does this warmth
on the bridge of my nose,
this droplet hanging
from the hair of my brow,
weave itself from a story
that needs no universe?

I honestly don't want
to muck around with the weather.
It seems to have
such a nice indifference.
Like the storm that just came in
and destroyed all our hopes
after such a beautiful Summer.
Remember our sincerity.

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS V FORTUITY (SHEEL OF CLOUDS)

1. one excuse

One excuse was to say
I forgot the time
(or you simply ran out

of time)

Time, for something so
relative;
(lying on the beach);
works remarkably well
(we always used it
instead of humour)

There was always plenty
of it
to fight in
And none left
to quickly make love in
the morning (before work)

(We'll make up for it
later)
But there was a storm
(and you had to spend
the night)
in another town
looking over the sun

But rain rains down
inside my ear
With that noise
inside of shells
(It never changes)
and I can't hear
(that you are waiting)

But I don't need
any evidence to know
that time
is culpable

2. two ways of arriving at surrealism

How many dreams
present the life of the protagonist?
the girl with only one heart?
someone on the run?

He was standing on the corner
miming a scene of torture
when he heard the first sound
(more like somethin' bashed into somethin'
than somethin' bashed loose)
and his leg fell into the gutter
He had his foot in the stream

The sun, just pulling up its toes
under that cloud
At that moment he knew
just what that leg was worth
(he had no idea, exactly,
what a leg was worth)

The girl was walking,
so slow down the beach
Crying. Her tears
delivered up to her
by clouds
with tiny hands of salt
She's got straight hair
and a new nose
(they bashed it with a little hammer
till it came loose)
It was worth a lot to her –
she even gave up
being the Queen of Egypt

And it was only by accident:
the car with a scalpel;
the surgeon losing control;
inside a shell, the sky –

3. three times around the moon

And it's just a game
Put it up to your ear

Out driving
the shadows rush to meet us
Our mistakes

He asked
Can we still be in love
when dirt is falling
from the sun
With the moon
rolling its knuckles
over my back

And she was slow
like a snail
to answer
Go another three
times round
the sky
It's safe –
we live inside

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS VI

AUTHORSHIP

Mountains, valleys, rivers merge
The land hides itself
in landscape
The day's form buried in my eye
like a grandmother in her coffin

The havoc of life is closed to the look
The shadow has taken to one eye
Ancient nights are never as old
as the days, simply light
all seen, unsaveable

The bitterness of her face
Madarosis and skin submerged
in sweet lake of destruction
deeper than this time
I note with now

The book that is better
tells of your embrace
The rockweed and the small fish
being careful in the nooks
of tossed waters

Death is not sudden
like stumbling into this love
but takes every beat of the heart
Joy married over and over
to the cough, the wheeze, the biographer

SEVEN MYSTERIOUS SONGS VII

CONDUIT

Water, water song
my body flows with
thoughts and blood

Remember the sickness
when my body would
allow not even water

I would die in a place
with no rustles
no movement

A bird would come
without moving

its wings

Perhaps in the
transubstantiation
of fire

There would be so much
life in it
Like a stream it could tell me

where it had been
What other kinds
of love it had known

The Specifics of Love

for R.M.

I love shaking the bones in your arm
the humerus, radius and ulna.

Some people have *such* bones –
men, like you, across the top of the back!

I love you at the train station
so young . . .

The song of that bird
executed only in the morning and evening.

I love the way
you just do it!

Perfect commas, two profiles, eyelashes
moles and turtles in your smile.

I love the movement between our reality
and imagination – that gold step

then my head empties into the whirl of the day
all brain stem!

I love your judgement: chaise-longue
in that spacious room of possibility

filled with sun and poetry and music
and the pain you will not deny.

I love the little red hat
that makes you look like someone else

and the early fruit you pick for me
when I am overcome by ripeness.

I love fucking you
most of all:

there is no corresponding analysis
and we become very old and not yet born . . .

I love wrapping the bones of my legs around you
femur, tibia and fibula –

only with you
can I feel my heart.

I love its weightiness
that I have learned

through the long, slow practise
of you.

God's Silence

for Jack Gilbert

The fog in these mountains
is a reminder
of how far up our feet are
when they are on the ground.
As the baby has aged
she has taken up wrestling
with my breast.
As if the milk had bones.
The gorge is like owning something
frightening, merging with the self
what won't sustain life.
The stars' odour.
The man who felt so keenly
that all around him hearts broke
like the tears of a young girl
for an animal.
Occasionally you hear the gunshot
and yellow-headed birds
with the fan of their wings
spin fear into beauty.
The children don't remember the city.
Its expensive horizon.
Here, they listen to a history
of sing-song in the rain.
Here, where God never says anything.

Blue Flower

for Georg Trakl

Autumn can last a lifetime.
There can never be enough blue and black.
Wandering has a passion of its own.
A suffering without direction.
There is only one month.
There is only one large death.
The country opens onto its unploughed fields.
A short lyric is one who passes.
Made of earth and coarse poetry.
No longer ears and eyes.
No longer indignance and inclination.
What sort of desire is unreasonable?
What sort of living?
Landscapes occur as if they were limits.
Repentance seeps from the body in breath.
Winds have speech with shadows.
Paths break into the infinity along their sides.
Autumn again after the last Autumn. Beyond, a man's back.
He is always walking away.
He turns many times to glimpse his executions.
Empty.
The world is empty of him.
Only time is filled to the brim with his unending selves.
Everywhere they vanish like fallen snow.

ALI COBBY ECKERMANN

b. 1963

Ali Cobby Eckermann is a Yankunytjatjara / Kokatha kunga (woman) born on Kaurna land in 1963. As a baby Ali was adopted into the Eckermann family. After failed attempts she was assisted by Link Up to find her mother Audrey, and four years later her son Jonnie. Her journey was supported by many members of the Stolen Generations. She regularly visits her traditional family in rural and remote South Australia; to learn and to heal. After nearly thirty years in the Northern Territory, Ali chooses to live in the 'intervention-free' village of Koolunga, South Australia, where she is renovating the old general store and establishing an Aboriginal Writers Retreat. Ali is currently researching Aboriginal massacres in South Australia and was awarded grant money for this project by the Australia Council.

Ali Cobby Eckermann's first book of poetry *little bit long time* was published by the Australian Poetry Centre as part of the New Poets series in 2009. *little bit long time* sold out in months and has been reprinted by Picaro Press. Along with the publication of 'Intervention Payback' in that year's *Best Australian Poetry* edited by Robert Adamson, *little bit long time* introduced Ali Cobby Eckermann's work to an Australian audience and firmly established her as a strong and vital emotive voice within Australian Aboriginal literature and one of the most remarkable poets to emerge in Australian poetry since the 1970s. Her work has garnered her many invitations to national and international literary festivals, including the prestigious Ubud Writers and Readers Festival held each year in Indonesia. Her second collection, *Kami*, was published in 2010 by Vagabond Press.

Ali has won several awards including First Prize in ATSI Survival Poetry competition in 2006, First Prize Dymocks Red Earth Poetry Award NT in 2008, and was Highly Commended for the Marion Eldridge Award in 2009. Her poetry has been translated and published in Croatia, Indonesia, Greek and New Zealand. Her first verse novel *My Fathers Eyes* will be launched in Sydney March 2011. When asked why she writes, Cobby Eckermann responded:

I guess I write for both my families, and for my ongoing healing that I need in my life. Mostly though for the Aboriginal audience. It is my biggest thrill is when they attend any forum to hear my words. I have been amazed at the reaction from the wider Australian and international audiences to my poetry, which encourages me to keep writing too . . . Poetry has also been the tool to assist my adopted family to understand some of the change that occurred deep within myself. I often say "poetry saves lives".

Cobby Eckermann first started writing and publishing poems from an early age, but it was not until her mid thirties that she began to write and publish regularly. She entered the Bachelor College of Indigenous Tertiary Education in Alice Springs in 2001 to study creative writing, which resulted in various performances and publications coinciding with a period of great change as she reconnected to her Aboriginal heritage:

I loved that classroom of Aboriginal writers, as it was the year that I met my son again; he was eighteen. My life was changing rapidly (I had only met my birth mother four years previous) and poetry was my life-line, as were those handful of students and Aboriginal lecturer / poet and author Ms Terry Whitebeach. As my reconnection with family took me further and further into the desert, and back to traditional Yankunytjatjara roots, the poetry sang louder and I began to discover who I was born to be.

Responding to Cobby Eckermann's first collection, her teacher and mentor Terry Whitebeach noted, "These are the offerings of a writer who has journeyed with great determination through apparently irretrievable loss, through chaos, disintegration and desolation, who has harvested the gifts of insight and emotional and spiritual intelligence and compassion, and who now reveals these insights to the eyes and ears of others through lucid images and punchy language." Whitebeach zeroes in on the lucidity, intelligence and compassion, the deft control of language that makes Ali Cobby Eckermann a successor to the late Dorothy Porter. Poems such as 'Wild Flowers' and 'Kumana' exhibit the same clarity and careful use of language, combining Aboriginal English, Yankunytjatjara and Australian English, to create unfamiliar and powerful effects from the demotic, the everyday accents of Australian, so that the reader is forced to look more closely at what was familiar. Poems such as 'I Tell Ya True', 'Intervention Payback' and 'Grade One Primary' use these same gifts to give voice to the brutal realities of Aboriginal experience and dispossession experienced since colonisation and ongoing today. Cobby Eckermann's poetry is courageous in its ability to look at present and past brutalities directly and remain compassionate.

I hope that audiences who hear my words will have a better understanding of Aboriginal life and the emotional impact of past and present (bad) policy, especially the Stolen Generations. If this can be achieved through my poetry and prose then I can die happy. This drive has prompted me to open Aust's first Aboriginal Writers Retreat in my home at Koolunga in mid north South Australia, in the aim for more grassroots and heartfelt Aboriginal literature to be written and published.

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A Promise

She gives him a cloud of parrots
He expects her to peel the carrots
She gives him a safari cruise
He expects her to hide the bruise
She gives him a blue magic rabbit
He expects her to feed his habit.

He gives her a kicking horse
She expects his true remorse
He gives her a rotting plum
She expects a little freedom
He gives her his silver spoon
She expects she'll kill him soon.

A Parable

Interventionists are coming interventionists are coming
the cries echo through the dusty community
as the army arrive in their chariots.

Parents and children race for the sand hills
burying the tommy axes and the *rifela*
hiding in abandoned cars
along the fence line.

One woman ran to the waterhole
hiding her baby in the reeds
dusting her footprints with gumleaf.

Other children went and got their cousin
shouting *mum you gone rama rama*
you should see the clinic.

That night the woman went back to the waterhole
leaving her child in the reeds again
this time in a basket.

In the morning the children return
holding their cousin crying
mum you gone rama rama
you should see the doctor.

At the clinic I feel her pulse
check her blood pressure
test for diabetes.

Staring deeply in my eyes
until finally our heads bent
she whispers quietly in Luritja

this son him name Moses.

Ayers Rock / Uluru

old Mr Uluru
a proud man
the day the Rock
was handed back
sits waiting

old Mr Walkabout
a proud man
at the twenty-fifth
anniversary of the
hand back
sits waiting

in the Red Rock tavern
the old men sit
waiting

yous wanna beer
the barman yells

he comes over
whatcha waiting for

the old men stare out
over their Country
waiting

waiting
for recognition
as Traditional Owners

more than just
a few days
in their life time.

Shells

in an aisle
of middens
he blocks her
advance
they laugh
as they prepare
for war
his shiny shell
embellished spear
in hand
watching her
body paint
in white ochre
her breasts
her stomach
her thighs
glisten white
on alabaster
skin
soon to turn
red.

JOHN KINSELLA

b. 1963

Australian John Kinsella has written over 20 books of poetry, as well as plays and fiction; he also maintains an active literary career as a teacher and editor. Kinsella's poetry is both experimental and pastoral, featuring the landscape of Western Australia. Paul Kane observed in *World Literature Today*, "In Kinsella's poetry these are lands marked by isolation and mundane violence and by a terrible transcendent beauty." His *The New Arcadia* (2007) is a book-length exploration of Western Australia's timeless and timeworn landscape; the book is informed by the history of the country and the bucolic poetic tradition.

In his "Alternative Biography," Kinsella describes himself as "a vegan anarchist pacifist of 16 years . . . a supporter of worldwide indigenous rights, and an absolute supporter of land rights."

Kinsella has received many awards for his poetry, including the Western Australian Premier's Book Award and the John Bray Award for Poetry from the Adelaide Festival; he has won fellowships from the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

Kinsella has taught at universities in Australia and at Kenyon College in the United States. Founding editor of the journal *Salt* in Australia, he serves as international editor at the *Kenyon Review*. His interviews with other writers and selections of his poetry can be found on his website.

There is little doubt that Kinsella's vibrant and voracious poetic intellect is a prodigious event on the horizon of international poetry. As a poet, critic, teacher, pamphleteer, publisher and activist, Kinsella has fast become one of the most widely known Australian voices of his generation.

In what might seem like a short-space of time, Kinsella's has established not simply a considerable oeuvre which has won high praise internationally from critics such as Harold Bloom, George Steiner, Marjorie Perloff and fellow-poets such as Les Murray, Lyn Hejinian and Peter Porter, but become a dynamic, perhaps unequalled force, in the promotion of contemporary poetry at various levels through publishing, editing and essaying. Most remarkable of Kinsella's many feats is the establishment of the Cambridge-based Salt Publishing with his publishing partners Chris and Jen Hamilton-Emery, creating a truly international and independent publishing house, and around it a community of authors.

Kinsella also manages to juggle being a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, an Adjunct Professor to Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and Professor of English at Kenyon College in the United States, along with numerous ventures as an editor not simply for Salt Publishing but with journals such as *Westerly*, *Overland* and *The Kenyon Review*, among other guest-editor spots. Poet and publisher, essayist and critic, editor and promoter, activist and academic, Kinsella is currently rolling many lives into one, across time-zones, poetics, vested interests and national borders.

Kinsella's poetry is a working of environment: its creation, questioning, evocation, testing. For Kinsella, language is the natural environment. Poetic

discourses or traditions such as the pastoral or the avant-garde form layers in the geology of the same. Critics and editors approaching Kinsella's work often drive it into two apparently discrete regions of the experimental and the more plainly lyrical, at the expense of the interweaving of these not mutually-exclusive preoccupations. Indeed, Kinsella's two most recent collections, enforce this reading of his work by degrees. Where *Peripheral Light*, edited and introduced by Harold Bloom, gathers together "pastoral in the last ditch", *Doppler Effect*, introduced by Marjorie Perloff, brings together Kinsella's 'experimental', or as Perloff corrects, 'innovative', work. That said, a poem such as 'Warhol at Wheatlands' offers a pretty good insight into the hybrid nature of Kinsella's imaginative world:

. . . maybe he's asleep
behind his dark glasses? Wish Tom
& Nicole were here. He likes the laser
prints of Venice cluttering the hallway,

the sun a luminous patch trying
to break through the dank cotton air
& the security film on the windows.

Deadlocks & hardened glass make him feel
comfortable, though being locked inside
with Winchester rifles has him tinfoiling

his bedroom – he asks one of us but we're
Getting ready for seeding & can't spare a moment.
Ringnecked parrots sit in the fruit trees

& he asks if they're famous.

While not as patently 'experimental' as poems such as the iconoclastic (at least in terms of Australian poetry) Syzygy, 'Warhol at Wheatlands' displays the process of linguistic displacement and interrogation that characterizes much of Kinsella's work. Drawing the doyen of Pop Art and surface into the rural realities of Kinsella's imaginative heartland, the Wheatbelt of Western Australia, Kinsella mines this clash of ontological modes not simply for humour and distraction, not simply parlour games, but to question notions of surface and depth. The strange force of 'Warhol at Wheatlands' – and of Kinsella's best work generally – is that in its dislocations and dislocutions, it captures a commonality across the variegation of experience entering poetic discourse.

The pastoral idyll of 'Wheatlands' is complicated not simply by Warhol's presence (or that of the Polaroids or laser-prints for that matter) but by the reality of the season and the climate which themselves defy and deny attempts to idealise. Equally, the superficiality Warhol in part represents, the exhaustion of meaning in humanist terms, is neatly inclined against the pathos of Warhol's paranoia ("tinfoiling his bedroom") and his very basic and human fragility ("the sudden change has left him wanting"). Akin to, and no doubt influenced by, John Tranter's series of displacements such as 'Enzensbergers at Exiles', 'Warhol at Wheatlands' creates an environment where humanist and linguistic codes conflict but also cross-generate, where the lyrical and the linguistic 'I' co-exist.

For Kinsella, poetry is always political. Not simply as proselytizing or propaganda, poetry becomes a site of linguistic and social revolution. Kinsella's poetics are indivisible from his politics, which are orientated around his practices as a pacifist-anarchist-vegan. Similarly, it is hard to view much of Kinsella's work without the lens of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, for the theories of which Kinsella has been something of an Australian conduit, influencing several younger Australian poets and generally broadening and deepening the level of recent critical engagement with poetics in Australia.

To L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, all language is viewed as political, and it is the poet's task not to fall back into the rhetoric and complacency of simply producing lyrical poetry centred upon the reaffirmation of egocentric logic or a logocentric ego. Language, the symbolic system within which we come to the world, is set upon the semiotic, the vital presymbolic, alogical forces and rhythms that flow below the level of the symbolic and break out, disordering its logic and disrupting its established flows and currents of power.

Much of this is taken from contemporary French thought, most specifically Julia Kristeva's reading into the works of Lautreamont and Mallarmé. For Kristeva, the excavation of language excuted by these two quite disparate poets, does not represent simply a revolution in poetic language but in the social body as well, as it reorientates the very structures through which the human subject comes to the world through ruptures in the repressive forces of the symbolic. One criticism that has been raised against the various assimilations and redeployments of these ideas – criticisms that have equally been raised against the work of Lautreamont and Mallarmé – is that of needless obscurity and of over-theorisation. Such criticism smells of bad blood and elitism, as much as labeling more plainly spoken lyrical poets as 'diarists' or 'kitchen-sink poets'. Each world has much to offer, not least for its sense of strangeness and estrangement.

It is important to note here that when I first approached John Kinsella about contributing to the Australian magazine of PIW, he raised a series of concerns regarding the very nature of the 'Australian' magazine, and the development of discrete sites orientated around the idea of 'nation' as a way of presenting literature or indeed any form of discourse, premised as it is on closed notions of community. In his essay 'Anthologising the Nation', he writes:

To open lines of communication between different kinds of poetries coming out of a spatial zone that implies shared language, geography, social and cultural concerns, and political frameworks, can be useful in presenting a picture of how that place works subtextually. But it is also limiting, and tends to help establish a nationalist discourse, a collective identity that places those outside the fabric as Other. This Other varies in degrees of rapprochement and alienation, but all those outside the place denoted by the rubric 'Australia' become the necessary counterpart in a binary that defines collective identity. This can easily become the machinery of oppression, the emotional and potentially propagandist means of oppressing those who aren't of the nation.

On this last point, as an editor it has been my aim to engage just these issues regarding the shifting, sometimes shift, determinations of what 'Australia' might mean and how it is variously expressed.

I had hoped to include Kinsella's long poem *Syzygy* here, as it in many ways was central in opening up of new territory in Australian poetry, and seems the most successful of his more language-based interrogations. The poems selected here from Kinsella's voluminous work are but a small sample, with – in the absence of *Syzygy* – a bias toward his more readily accessible work. Several of these poems offer

cautionary tales about the risks humans take in presuming authority over our environment, be it the phenomenal (such as ‘Drowning in Wheat’ and ‘Death of a Farm Boy’) or the linguistic (such as ‘Tarot’). In these poems, the environment – equally land and language – is a force reckoned with and which comes not so much to subvert human presumptions of authority and sovereignty, but to press us toward a deeper sense of interconnectedness, the need for relation without aggression, for community without borders.

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Eagle Affirmation

You've got to understand that sighting the pair
of eagles over the block, right over our house,
not more than twenty feet above the roof,
so massive their wings pull at the corrugated
tin sheeting even with gentlest tilt, counteracts
bitterness against all the damage I see and hear
around me on an exclusively crisp blue morning,
when clarity is pain and even one small missing
wattle tree, entirely vanquished since I was last here
at home—I still find this hard to say—is agony;
a region is not a pinpoint and a different compass
works in my head, having magnetics for all
directions and all pointing to one spot
I know and observe as closely as possible;
and even one small vanished or vanquished
wattle tree is agony close to death for me,
where I find it hard to breathe to feed myself
to get past the loss; but the pair of eagles
still appearing and keeping their sharp
and scrupulous eyes honed, overrides
this ordeal, though I wish their victims
life too and their damage is traumatic
as anything else; that's as much sense
or nonsense as I can make in such blue light.

Balloon

It didn't happen in that order—
the endless growl of what will turn out to be
miniature quad and trail bikes, carried along
the top of the valley and rumbling its contents:
small kids with helmets weighing more than their heads,
ragged on by parents with crossed arms and ambition
in their eyes: round and round the drone of fun.
A country pursuit. Tracy tells me a professor
of economics at a local city university
while praising capitalism says he will only
listen to opposition if it comes from one
who eats only lentils, has given up cars
and eschews imported brands of foodstuffs. Lentils?
Contradictions aside, I'll take him on, though
it might be hard to hear me speak above the junior
quad-bike circus performing along the hills. But hark,
I'll tell you something unusually usual: at dusk
wandering the block with Katherine we came across
shreds of chemical-pink balloon with plastic string
attached to its tied-off umbilical cord, clearly
an escapee from a party, the child—her name
decorating the balloon with three crosses for kisses—
in tears, chasing it up into the sky, watching
it drift over the hills, her letter to the world
a single word and her mark made over. Katherine
asks if I recall the balloons her class back in England
released with school name and address and how one
floated all the way over the Channel and on to Belgium
where another child picked up the shreds and deciphered
the message and wrote back; weather balloons, “hopes
and ambitions” as Delmore says, but without doubt
or skepticism, in full expectation they will land
somewhere far away and bring joy to the finder.
I throw the shred of balloon away, fearing
an animal crossing the block in the dark,
night-eyed and keenly sampling the ground
and the air with its snout, will reread or misread
the code of chemical pinkness, and like some Red
Riding Hood in reverse, choke on the gift of chance.

Syzygy

1 APPREHENSION

And how did you feel
the surface too close
and the flappers fizzing
at your tender
and vulnerable
feet
loaded with misgivings?
Swift overload catapulting
recrimination
the largess culminating
cinema papers boys-own-annual-ing
from post office to mailbox
and bicycle-clip braces
on the malignant bull terrier's
teeth: an island of green
reticulated sucked into the soft pink
of the suburb, insurmountable the ratepayer's
anguish and bravado! the house a kraken
or bathysphere undercutting the plane,
adjunct to surface, one dimensional
suction. O fear ripples evading
sonar buoys Blue Gum Lake
receding as bores suck effluent
from beneath the arses of ducks.

Paperbarks turn black
water soils over
banks of sodden bread
and soft drink cans
this is popular viewing
medium small frame minutiae
chronic screen or inhabited pasture,
pointillist and contentious
cartooning serious ineptitudes
hatchback unravelling a bend
the lock-stock
barrelling it into sticky drink
at the bottom of the can: sure,
we feel strung up and depleted — light
even heavy and darkness uplifting,
necessitating remission into screaming
as the engine revs the flywheel
seems not to move dear o dear
love's texts spread haphazardly over the bucket
seats — and don't we know
they're braggarts! denying fusion

and invading asteroids, deploying
consumables and calling
it art.

2 FALLOUT

A refugee from contention I load
stills into the projector
taking the negative impression
adjuncting
expression prising anger
out of its folds
the damage budding retentive
small experiment releasing heat:
remember looting these impressions?
machinery expressive and light-conscious
love scarifying poise
the tractor rocketing the clods of loamy earth
bootlegging frustration mudbrick and fencewire
circular-saws threatening Robert Frosts
and doorpost jamming two years too old
and rotting, the sun orange plastic,
perfect, the film was black
and white and the sheep gurgling
hysterically.

3 SELF-REGARD

ing homonculous metals chambers
tinfoiling exclusions like humidicribs
wheeling slick asphalt deletions
and stripping film, dust water licking
axminster carpet spreadsheets — what shows
in the headlights or pinheaded
spotlight? Crunch. Synthetic victims.
And the frogs croak politely
in their ditches. HALT! Good year
wet weather halts the death of a zebra
just outside a butcher's shop. Can't read the signs
good who gives a damn anyway?
Needed, inquire within: good management
and sensible market indicators.
Those who leave anything up to description
need not remote opinions. Morality
stinks, we keep it in buckets.

4 WHEN THE FLAPPERS TICKLE YOUR FANCY

opposing needs, priming pellegra
with plastic cement like jelly rubber
singing aging movies, tall tales lugging drabness
out of forums: humitrophic, water glass

or sundial gas-bagging in the shade, Ah
such is fame passing the time. The car comes.
A stretch in tails. Silk doors predella
adjuncting talent AND the driver. Let us in!
Take us entire rhomboidal all and Oolala
susurrous through disconnexion, baffling
sibilence. O my flappers, what a team we make!
And the planets co-habitate and read life
impression, you have your strict
and your lax, the cups drink too much
and the television in the back of the limo
is stuck on the same channel. The driver
is sucking himself. Take no notice.
You are my family he splurges:
executors guardians trustees
receivers inheritors
good sides half backs
flankers absorbers potentates
contrivers emissaries
agitators incarnations
lovers leaping onto the tired pile
of my flesh.

5 THE CANE CUTTER

Reflex take a breath. () A snake
operates amongst rough cane-cutter's crystalline sweat.
A particle overload.
Heavy rain bearing down
palpitating trifoliate with sun and cane
no rainbow
makes an appearance.
Earthy very earthy. Miasma
camouflaged mud takes all takers
and throws back a marsh of fences.
They beg for tariffs. They like restrictions.
In the highlands water is lightning
gaping press-down and half bas-relief.
Turbine churn-out comes down
from highlife where the air is heady.
No fireflies there. Dowsed and riddled
deep deep south roots dry the bone-black
subterranean streams, raddled shapes forking azurine
on meeting archaeological light, spent swarming
the traps, for this is Ground Zero Warholing
in cyclone territory, zoning the sirens
equivocating hot dogs and pies mushrooms
pushed to the side of the plate: cadillacs
rocketing Monroe hubcaps
currency cut like love
on a breezy day, hot air concentrating

in the sewers.

6 LIFE-DRIVER

Placating pit swimmers
the bone mill splurgers
credit cards bursting middle-class prognosis
dialectic good will and science
is upon us bursting prognosis
good will tragacanth
imprint forms lotus form
the new behemoth, a signature naked
beneath the ultra-violet: rex regis
suppressing atoll watchers, spreading
blood and bone over the garden. Lair-down devil
lair down! Vrooom!

7 SUBJECTING OBJECTS TO SERIOUS SCRUTINY

Draining absence as blue
trance stelazine melting circulars
restraining the abstract
fingerpainting
lithium to bind
Mono Mondrian on its platform of shape:
threatening construction on its very
printed page, corrector fluid
swashbuckling first words
formatted like a river ending
in a window mouse decorating
graphic disasters
without compassion. We impose.
Macrographic-Beta-Language.
And you don't even have to
drop names!
Advertising blimps
nudge traffic controllers pneumatic
in their agitating seats,
tattoos green with red tracers
running like hits. Here, disasters
falsetto screech sus. per coll.
like corporate suicide
across the polished screens.

8 THE FOREST, THE FARM. A HYBRID BATHYSPHERE

Lumped or polyglotted, mixing
but insistent on claustrophobic
limits, cans of repellent
stink like flypaper.
They undercut a fluid market

holding back the fragile forest,
rending tight-as-money-talk, marketeers
would cut sleepers where they stood:
Chinese whispers like nostalgia. Downburnt
the weird beast charts pressure, breath
contrivance as the water is fire:
volunteers roll back the pasture, the forest
corals and suffers. Greenhousing
the coldest waters, peepshow languishing
amongst saw-jawed lantern fish
surface molten, stripped of its cage.

9 INFLECTING AMBIGUITY / ELECTRIC TRAINS

A type of ambiguity
that carves the hissing wires
clouds volcanic on the scarp
as kids general motor it with a mania
that drives them East: surveillance
a seance partially materialising
voices from closets steel-faced
and never changing critics
like having a field day: tracks glisten
briefly like sin in its rage
cauterising
rugged-up patrons waiting
for concert tickets outside
the entertainment centre
as staunch pylons share goods and flashes
with cameras and country trains, not electric
but still photogenic. Dispensation
of tickets as curricles dash past
and we celebrate the past.

10 PALPABLE PALUDAL — THE DEFENCE RESTS

Palpable cacology — admit the document —
juggling heartburn
passing paludal intoxicants
adhesives and cleansing agents
out back the hardware store
supermarket strings strummed or struck
the plastic shopping bag dissolving
or blowing up like a lung,
thick and tumorous when breath whispers
triplicate super realist on super realist
zygal chevron zippered-up
the fire-escape rusted
and decompressed — the blossom
plucked while locked
in its cloak and cap, night-fruit

copping it sweet in daylight: our bodies
botanical: facades
as the tallest poppy
accepts the flak
its tinted window reflecting
it back, carbonaceous angels
triggering sumptuous sprinklers,
the housing estates sinking
into the swamp stomping
faddish death beats
only the well-heeled speak
borrowing cultural tid-bits
repackaged tender taste-sensitised
suppressing the threats.

11 DELETIONS

Fortitude rippling cross-sense-a-round
clip-board logic
accumulating detailing Harleys
like shepherd's calendars in the month
of January the heat was Cyrenaic and intense
displaced vermilion weathering
irregularities like windows
and quick assimilations, pique & niche,
lavender disaster soft and not in the slightest
mechanical — BUT deletion rakes
a monster making shape from less
than its constituents, well-made enigmas
propitiatory hermeneutic and well coded,
I differ camping on fault-lines highways upending
bridges siphoning rivers neuter
crushed velvet ripped from the dash,
die bobbing infra-red night sight slick like bedrock and pylons
congealed beneath town planners forgetting mud, acronym
comfortable city lazy body lay-about
the pool pretzels beer and much more: the 'staff of life'
single tracking compression and tidiness,
an accident absorbs clumping only
for publicity: obliquity luxuriant
first class dozer drivers machining silver spray
amyl nitrate staining fingers
in tills corporate gets-ya-goin' up and adam
furrowing nutrition and filling cavities.

12 ENTROPY / FLESH

Spontaneous bloodstock rattles and broods
lapping power-lifted pasture amidst
the fences — narcs and passive devourers of feed
immunising syringes. Meathood gestures gantries

and ramps while Soutine feeds love in a French
abattoir la la la B grade and trendy, rattle O three-tiered
calashes, looking brutal in the halogens, cauterising
debris up-ended white posts with red and silver
dazzlers lowering their lids, slipping on damp days
into the smell of wool and hide, mopping
placental blankets with rough tongues.
Window painting stretch addressing
ambulance and attendant starter motors
commensural commercial additives
like bolt guns stunning and electro-shock
on top of the hill beneath a liver-shaped moon
draining the blood from your nervous
system-ism, the spill-down lathering
the coronets of your contact-lenses, drainage inquiline
wearing it like a glove or
coating stomachs — STIFFEN UP LADS! the Hoi
polloi tax-evading and avoiding road-blocks
born into banking liquids that solidify
with limb-movement, the floor
approaching rapidly: a Gnostic
logion: the fish nibbles my toes
and good it feels sovereign vessels toes & lips
divisive
hobnobbing
traipsing stainless on the whetstone outcrop
sheep-weather-alert
or battery-bound and the wind chaffing tinwalls
clocking the pulse of eggdrop and peelable wool
and udders performing ridiculous labours: supreme-O
a brand name marketable, affirmations corporate
conferring garnished parsley hints, staking
first grade glue sticks how many shares?
brokered on the floor household cleansers
banish the addictive canvas, Ah tundra vista
the canvas captures and projects
the sky shocked and hooked
Mrs McCarthy & Mrs Brown
immobilised by Tuna fish, disaster spread
like emulsified stabilised sheen upon
Marilyn's tender lips c/- Big Sirs: Sir
of the pigskin briefcase, brylcream quinella
stated portfolio lapses pump-action
and blood-staked, entablature
en-loading your own quizzing sense-around. Smell it!
Singing western and roto broiling I've hooked a big one
bone black and threatening to move
quotes like numerous grains of dry powder
centrefire monumentalised 1080
vacuuming heat-sealed trophies skins
pre-packaged mise-en-scene urging texture

out of quadrature, are the brittle black
cuttlefish, sepia toning cinemas
flensing storage facilities, you drag
something up out of memory and into sight.
Steaming black frost cleansing sun deliciously sharp
and breakfasting on the damp patio, lush tallow
candle canopying shades and predicting a good
hard-humping sunset. Progenate policedog
physiology derived and detecting goals
evaluating hereditary from 'weaning to slaughter'
heterozygous random caracass the beauty
collapses, Santayana might have been ugly.

13 RIPPLES

Streaming blue divisions, sections
of the neighbourhood, the lights of Canning Vale
ludicrous sporting brilliance rainslicks
like the MCG and gracing a stadium of cages —
Movietone ships sink and planes disperse
in black strategy, walk-on parts erotically
developing & reproducing cryptic typologies;
passion active and unassailable, declaring
intermittently, rippling like the skin
of persons or sulo-bins rattled by traffic,
city initiated carnivale for officers
on chilly Autumn nights ekeing out nostalgia
clumped together at the same scene long after
the bang, roadgame, cosmic microwave
background radiation as the fighter plane
sends tracers spitting into columns
of uniformly spread refugees: organisation
saves none of them.

14 TRIGGER

Yoke the vicious integer, sun and moon
uncomfortably syzygetic: 'Deep Throat'
shifting consensus, plead your case
and get the hell out of here. I won't
listen anyway! The quadrature sets limits
AND appeals X pronto. Things don't stick
unless they're forced to. No couples
can sit comfortably here: rekindling
love-on-a-pier, the car humming
on a verge or aiming for the country
downwind and forgetful upending the heart
off-loading blots of anger a clock chimes
in a mall of pastiche. Trigger, I fall
collecting apogaeon multiples of disorder.

15 LANDFALL / THE COLLAPSE OF BEAUTY

Loose materials patterning sundials
at water's edge: embracing saline
trend/'s crystalline fatigues
-loss- myriad system
-is-ation
interest vis-à-vis
disintegral compendiums, oil-slick
& refuse & foam casually concocting
beneath an historic swing bridge
a couple of hours [drive fro]m Perth, up-river
skiers hacking the lower
reaches
and paddocks might appear
mostly folds of beauty
— tourists understand this! — satisfying
rare inner-city creatures marooned
passive purposeful indulgently
headlines might claim.

16 CHEMICAL

Boom-arm pod-fed nuzzles teaming foam
out over red earth: new machines
churning chemical seas in-lateral drift-a-round
phenomenally hand-in-hand with tractors
and deranged furrows rippling
heavy clods of soil
run-off creek river sea
deranged furrowing residual
when myth hits purchase
who wants clean food?
bulimic south anorexic mid-point
dr i p-fed north
deep-inhaling flyspray
and mosquito coils
fr - ie - ze dried coffee
cleaning a particularly
stubborn stove or bad guests
from a party.

17 FIRST BLOOD

Tubed out of you warm and recycled cold.
Flow impedes logic cold as stainless
steel like a disinterested object
of beauty, sun-bathing internal solarium
blood ultra'd & raddled
re: transfusion. Dizzy float extract
inflatables, double toxicological

cell-sized machines making repairs
restructuring walls disengaged
by injective inter-ex-change
blood money breathes
franchise fantastic voyage
efficient redistribution
for this they test. byo.
branching profusely
gaining the respect
of ambulance drivers
slamming T-bar automatics gloved
and averting, petrol-guzzling
monsters finned and beautiful
gybing through your sanguine &
unguent utterings
staunch against venomous
'{Dais de l'oeil revulse}'
bathe five death on red/s: (a) disaster
guilt feud bath (h)ound letting lust sport
thirsty money-stained sucker
auspicate consanguinity
rarely colourless or violently positive
genealogy suppurating
my grandfather fell
into the offal pit: Benny's Bonemill
circa
1923.

18 PEINE FORTE ET DURE

What pleads 'I',
in the gloom, of
bulb-blow
& ocean-carpet
closing shore
lee & lea
to hills
a sprinkle of desquamating quartz
sun-dank
spent
re-flex-ive
though who owns the fragments (?)

19 GLOAT

who lives by
lies by
and
buy re-active blood/y
mis-fortune
assigned Con tra Dik shuns

an audience despite their buying
him drinks
pneumatics taxonomy dialectics
& quark of despair.

20 FEEDBACK

Charles (O)lson
'Not one death but memor
to accumulation but change, the feedback is
the aw

21 FUME

Soil tactless infuses
dust-cradles □ objectifies
black frost on breathing land
fuming. anger military
pro fuse Ion deficient
upper upper flight
developing a dislike
for 'us': the bulldozers
have sweet teeth & fume.

22 FLOAT — ING

(I) [Respond]

Respond
float-ing soil
heresy
and the fog
absorbs pink-quartz
thrust-drift.

(II) [Tractor churns heavy]

Tractor churns heavy
despotic bones: sheep anatomy
undering edgy discs
and salty furrows luminous
night-work
driver's red-neck hurts.

(III) [Fencing wire coils]

Fencing wire coils
snakes complex
in gullies

crops
and wild radishes
rot.

(IV) [Scour stalk-base and stubble]

Scour stalk-base and stubble
vast rimmed fields
charred in waves,
ash-water lapping
like gout: first rains
float.

23 NARRATIVE

(i) telescope: passive

Up in the hills / closer: week (end) tours
not the building you'd think
[though] they've made
the right moves in the foyer. The
predicate fails to leave, we assume
via adjustin gth efoca llen g th
that he's always been (t)here! Zeiss
optics.

(ii) the night sky might be an all day sucker

take down [to] flatlands the jigger
of nostalgia — a few slides lo-priority
& secure. they call him Kid. hey Kid
cop a load of the moon} loud in his
ear pricking with chilly air, it & the sun.
orange & blue.
his father's hand conjoin-
ing
with an ear
left spare.

(iii) the living planet

seeder/combine. re-building
rain-washed spreads. the water deleterious & demi.
And all they've got to say
Is what a wonderful vista!
Not city lights absorbing
The stars — even the moon
Looks (more) vivid. Taut. here
Check out sun in summer's
centre
Comes the reply. I'll bet ya!
Cannot [any] lies well in randomness?

(iv) expansion

lock stock and barrel
ie carrying its orbit in-
consistently. Note:key words. access?
Proper
bucketing

they gave him.
Proper. and they've electrified the railway
as well.
what the hell, he drank his first wine
at communion. transfixed: Kid's re-
call.

23 NA(RRA)TIVE / chapelle ardente

Syz-23-key: uh oh
fetish or frou-frou
aza labels & ers on
artifize the case:
richter's rats struggle
& quickly
give up: identify. musical casing
setted. Up up up!

Rhe
-toric plans an
invest atations & calendars: grey
gunboats sweeping
dank rainforest rivers. patrons
of calypse & stoker
the moon drums UP tides: awash
melt-in-the-mouth} riprap.
& drawn out. ra ra ra.

isotopies
Id di
possières
gestes
temps perdu tristan tzara
morphemic and trendy
up-
wards & categorise?

linger
mechaniser
'senex iratus'
swiftly
sits: progression towards
a system. Yes.
Yes.

logos
go go
& presuppose a % of
an □
[vraisemblance]
eschews a?

Touchy on a point
of picture & linkage = so what?
newstart with a kick
& get comfortable.

This case has potential: look,
they've got the drop
on you. De-
tailing
edifice &
scripture/s &
inspire-
ation: the sun brightens
the shell grouting
paving the lap lap
of motoring stretched
waves & sandbar circumflexed
the pillars softly set
and sinking, coming unstuck
on soft-served banks, upwards
& downwind the puckered hills
glow like the haze. A fly
settles on a fish corpse
and dies.

23.5 PANTOUM

souwester blows cold
ha ha says granma
you'll chill to the bone
out there on the water

ha ha says granma
we gotta anyway
out there on the water
that's where goes sun & moon

we gotta anyway
cold when it oughta be hot
that's where goes sun & moon
burst & mix with blue

cold when it oughta be hot
we saw it in the telescope
burst and mix with blue
burnt dark like the road

we saw it in the telescope
granpa let us look

burnt dark like the road
and too close to lie

23 LIFT

Ex hale and don't re-
(in) flate
it's dark
when you go out
{ing} the fires
retract wetlands
breath iced lakes
spoonbill & ibis
lurch-dance (in) space
{ing} mongrams
[memory] re-
call the day, the weight
of light-lift, roll-back
sun buoyant
sienna-&-orange luff & clouds & hills
obsessive and
manic □ prone to out-
bursts
de rigueur
Ah! not love neat on the bus
I see {thru} your window/face
take
me back.

24 ON

Oh ON! loosely
never held pivot(al) sans
desire
on degeneration c/- object in
NO! touch me. On.

25 URBAN CROSS-OVER

Your soy coloured teeth
moth dust skin dys
function
-al: redress:
just a question
of supply: all roads lead in,
supply: all your
working daze: shopping trolleys
con-joining
in car-
parks. Howzat?

26 RURAL PATRONISING

Trill & twee wagtail lift
little nervous
nell-ies
take a break
at the heart the header
moves out over good soil
rippling like radiation
an electric
storm
spiriting
up-lifts,
& the fear
of fire & need for rain.

27 INTERMISSION

I chase a hair
over my lip
trace it
with
tongue
& shiver spine deep and
hear my insides
recoil: a glass
to the wall!

28 REALITY

If it's real it's been photographed
but not by lips
testing on recall cauterised
word(s) — slash & burn, scorched
earth realising opacity
of skin and smooth cool sight
in our hands, wounds
washed & THE LAND
never sulking.

29 LINK

Speech I link. Procrastinate.
'Weialala leia'. Eh?
What did you say?
Can't make
head nor tail.
Of it: lyric?

30: RE (CON) STRUCTURE ING / DAMAGE CONTROL

(a) ponge c/- or à la fahnestock

ah

'In this undergrowth, half shade half-sun
Who thrusts these sticks between our spokes?'

river white burnt & scullcraft
taunting drift downtide, down
in the mouth & down towards
the centrifugal drag, & towed
& motored the sherry stained
ramps. I cry & laugh and palpitate

& can

not right & moralise
& catastrophise & lies
out & about before sequestering
downs the spout & closes
the ment (al) gap: lash
out
no longer & yet
locate a shell of me like paving stones
zippy brass em[boss]-ing names
but not mine
god
willingly
the swells of pleasure lurid
& not a little jealous
of another era

seventy miles from here
where on lordly manors

clean hope
for forgiveness
but no more
blood below hook & rafter
becoming dirt
but
no more
cast in plaster
moulded joan of arc or jocaster
in revolutionary colours
caged & carved
biblical
red velvet fierce companions
perfect
eyes are missing
cont-
rol is

or has been
dam(ag)ed:

quartz or nacre
lose lustre (less)
minutiae
packed & labelled
analytic & rolling
fencewire
plugging gulleys

certain
even

lichen covered rags
scrunched & welded
ARE dead parrots
sauve-qui-peut
(I)

The point of impact
fabricates & inde
pend {ates} enances — a disc plough
or slave cylinder
mixing mediums
with disaster
intra-personally: saltwash,
the creeks are storming
the river
& the crops are
waterlogged — melaleuka & salt scars
collaborate in a bundesfest
discordant
visits politely
call ING music
out-back, the tractor [‘wends its weary way]
no longer bushbashing
but superating spray
from soil, frisking
clean air
& tourists
warm in town (as
Uncle Gerry
talks to Les Murray
who compares
Bunyah with

pasture
& a trio
of harmonists
make a go of friendship

without a tenor
providing a damn good

afternoon tea. You won't hear
cheques bouncing here. rather
sinking sand
& cockatoos.

& yes, we can hear the shutters
a-clicking & the chortle
of buses cruising down
the town's main street.

a stickler in a yella rain-jacket checkin'
the water troughs out in the rain
always wishing more sheep shelter
& the precise quantity & placement
of precipitate, as the tractor
sidles up to the silver fuel tank
& drinks.
this, I know. & release.
the tractor is a star!
out here.

hot lead is introduced
to Crater Valley. Not True valley,
more of a deep deep creek between granite
and sandstone sweeps & high language shot & sheeted, crumble
lipping down to the York Gummed floor
& sheets split as sharp
as plough discs. of course.
For Crater Valley is also
The Valley of Foxes.
& they come, cousins & weekend hunters
& deplete.
& the need for locusts
as the third bell is raised
in its tower & God spits yellow
is begrudgingly ac-

cepted.

& earth-tear
(as) families quake
stationwagons, earth snake
deep down & ripping up

Alien

hatchling. old barn down

and (the) wells drained:
fresh gullies
ground thunder

groundwater thunders (complete)
despair
backstroking cross-lane or cutting the windrows
of THE childhood nightmare I look
to the STREET
for a % -age & Age
& free (of)
tracasseries/ replete

(b) & ponge / fahnestock:
'As also for
grass to straw,
or to the calamus for writing

to the pipe of "inspiration"
(...and to the straw in the "cocktail",
in the tall glass of the "long drink")'

&>

the '&' is OUR angel.

Eh, balance up
spreadsheet
& paint on the carpet,
selling out
& making my almost (self)
<clear>. Eh, SPEAK UP
with subtlety:
I'm here & your practising virtue.

Eh, SPEAK UP
I can't hear & listen too quickly:

he shook the box
and could NOT
guess the contents.

Tractor parts.
Splinters from
THAT wagon wheel.
& a copy
of

POETRY

March 1966

Mary Ellen Solt: 'Flowers In Concrete'

'Magnificent

Auricles

Rousing

Insensate

Grief

Oh

Long

Death

Suddenly' # here bottlebrush trees

drag blood out of cemeteries.

Pillars of Salt

We always look back,
attracted by that feeling
of having been there before – the roads
sinking, the soil weeping (scab on scab
lifted), fences sunk to gullies
catching the garbage of paddocks,
strainers blocked by stubble
and machinery and the rungs
of collapsed rainwater tanks / and maybe
the chimney and fireplace
of a corroded farmhouse, once
the guts of the storm, now
a salty trinket.

The salt is a frozen waste
in a place too hot for its own good,
it is the burnt-out core of earth's eye,
the excess of white blood cells.
The ball-and-chain rides lushly
over its polishing surface, even dead wood
whittles itself out of the picture.

Salt crunches like sugar-glass, the sheets
lifting on the soles of shoes (thongs scatter
pieces beyond the hope of repair) – finches
and flies quibble on the thick fingers
of salt bushes, a dugite spits
blood into the brine.

An airforce trainer jet appears,
the mantis pilot – dark eyed and wire
jawed – sets sight on the white wastes
for a strafing run: diving, pulling out
abruptly, refusing to consummate.
Salt
explodes silently, with the animation
of an inorganic life, a sheep's skull no more
than its signature, refugees already
climbing towards the sun
on pillars of salt.

Pillage

The museum's frog info site is sponsored by Alcoa,
a company more responsible for the destruction
of Hills frog habitat than any other. I went to confirm
a childhood memory, and realised those tadpoles
and froglets and juvenile frogs we stole from their homes
under the spillway of Churchman's Brook Dam,
or from creeks or banks of those creeks downstream
that still ran unhindered by engineering, to lift
and bottle and translocate to our garden pond (a kind
of liberty, we imagined: an old concrete double-sided
washtub with its dividing wall smashed through
and plughole cemented and buried, so soil and grass
lapped its banks), were already or would become
Moaning Frogs and Motorbike Frogs. Both defined
by their noise, and not their psychologies
or composition. We'd observe tadpole conversions.
Alcoa mines bauxite. Aluminium comes from bauxite.
Each act of extraction is lexical and contrite as donation.
No E. M. Forster requirements for narrative
are required to tell this story. Its outcomes.
Though the sensation of frogskin on your skin
was more than citation. And it is with more
than détournement that we touch aluminium.

Warhol at Wheatlands

He's polite looking over the polaroids
saying gee & fantastic, though always
standing close to the warm glow

of the Wonderheat as the flames
lick the self-cleansing glass.
It's winter down here & the sudden

change has left him wanting. Fog
creeps up from the gullies & toupées
the thinly pastured soil. It doesn't

remind him of America at all. But there's
a show on television about New York so
we stare silently, maybe he's asleep

behind his dark glasses? Wish Tom
& Nicole were here. He likes the laser
prints of Venice cluttering the hallway,

the sun a luminous patch trying
to break through the dank cotton air
& the security film on the windows.

Deadlocks & hardened glass make him feel
comfortable, though being locked inside
with Winchester rifles has him tinfoiling

his bedroom – he asks one of us but we're
getting ready for seeding & can't spare a moment.
Ring-necked parrots sit in the fruit trees

& he asks if they're famous. But he
doesn't talk much (really). Asked about Marilyn
he shuffles uncomfortably – outside, in the

spaces between parrots & fruit trees
the stubble rots & the day fails
to sparkle.

Drowning In Wheat

They'd been warned
on every farm
that playing
in the silos
would lead to death.
You sink in wheat.
Slowly. And the more
you struggle the worse it gets.
'You'll see a rat sail past
your face, nimble on its turf,
and then you'll disappear.'
In there, hard work
has no reward.
So it became a kind of test
to see how far they could sink
without needing a rope
to help them out.
But in the midst of play
rituals miss a beat – like both
leaping in to resolve
an argument
as to who'd go first
and forgetting
to attach the rope.
Up to the waist
and afraid to move.
That even a call for help
would see the wheat
trickle down.
The painful consolidation
of time. The grains
in the hourglass
grotesquely swollen.
And that acrid
chemical smell
of treated wheat
coaxing them into
a near-dead sleep.

Death of a Farm Boy

Rebelliously
leaning his rifle
against the taut wires
of the fence
he stepped over,
pivoting
on his leading foot
watching as the barrel
began its slow arc
towards him;
the hair trigger
jarring
as the bead
of the sights
clipped a barbed twist,
the crack of firing
annihilating
the quail-heavy
fields.

Strange Metaphors

*'Isn't he the guy who uses strange metaphors —
like describing cars with teeth?'*

Anthony Lawrence

Collapse is wild with symmetry
and mechanical savants move with artistic
hands — making poetry out of the angry
expressions of car grilles. The drinks
waiter steps in just in the nick of time
and offers a vision of a sturgeon sailing
through flaccid waters driven by an ambient
wind, getting no further than the length
of its entrails. The clean-shaven makes
a cameo appearance, the grey barrel suit
setting the forget-me-not off perfectly.
After all, we are poets, and have got to be
able to make sense of this. Look! Quickly
the wedge-tailed eagle takes leave of its
broken body — no time to waste, it's a long flight
back to the Nullarbor. And, great joy, the day
is ours — watch Ashbery dip into a hint of Rilke
and lodge himself delicately amongst our words.
Though let's be wary and not display the trophy
yet — somebody at a distant table is suggesting
that there's more than a hint of ghost writer
about this, that strange metaphors have been
forced to do their captor's bidding.

The Compression of Time, Place and Incident

Fixed firmly, this comes as landfill,
a sealing of a tomb, a carving
of an epitaph. Too many times
I have sought the first notes
of a tune, the words of a song,
that would break the charm
that's held me to the farmer's words —
'Eagle, I'd remake you if I could.'
At Wind's Crossing and Eagle Point,
tethered to that ghost known locally
as Hathaways, the farmer stirs
his ti-tree fires and casts iron
loops about the hoop of a wheel,
marks time with a bronze quill,
explores the sound lapse,
insists that somewhere the eagle
is trying to call — landlocked —
unable to reach its eyrie perched
high overhead on the outstretched
arm of a charred York gum,
at the centre of Achille's shield.

Resurrection Plants at Nookaminnie Rock

They're full-blown in their early spring
rush – pin cushions a fakir's bed of nails
so soft to tread on, so easy to make false
comparisons by, and all the baggage that carries –
rest-break on a granite slab looking out over
the island sea of scrub shaded with formations
beneath a green lagoon's surface. It's what we
bring to the apogee before the drying-off,
dead crunch beneath our feet as rock-
dragons wake to the heat, and emphatic
belief that the dead will stay dead
and there will be no lift, no rebirth,
wherever you come from, whatever
you believe. Step carefully around these
wreaths hooked into granite sheen, holdalls
for a soil-less ecology, a carpet you know
would say so much more if your boots
were off and skin touched life brought
back, restored, gifted, bristling with death
because death is the most alive district
to inhabit. We could say so much more
if only we had the time.

Spontaneous Regeneration

I am here to rekindle
the moon dying in its race
for the sun, to break
the puff and bubble of salt,
to entertain the legions
of black-winged stilts
in their long march
to the dam, to harness
the wind dusting
knucklebones of a frayed
and peeling earth, to enter
the season of spontaneous
regeneration
in company.

Claws and Muscle: Short-beaked Echidna

Nearing sunset, the young echidna
performs an unusual act: it climbs
a granite boulder, then slides off,
headfirst, claws scratching rock
and lichen, impacting the ground
with its beak and with a *pock!*

Alarmed or just surprised, it slinks
into a crevice and rolls into a ball.
Landlocked, high in the valley,
it looks like a resplendent sea urchin—
gratuitous comparison, but one
that might clarify. The blond tips
of its brown-black spines seem
to live quasi-independently, or interact
like blocks of similar colours.

In the granite crevice, its spines
bristle and ripple with the search
for comfort, easing of anxiety.

Crouching and watching intently,
you study the echidna's growing confidence,
its snuffling re-emergence. It waddles
straight for you. 'Waddle' is not a weak
word, no diminutive. Its tiny eyes
fixed on the landform you are, it approaches,
claws testing the baked mud surface,
old-materials-beak fresh as the day
it settled on form and shape,
sniffing the ground for termites.
It circles you, slowly, methodically.
The relative nature of predation
works its ambiguous orbit as you picture
the fox you glimpsed two nights ago.
This small echidna has method
and intent and a resistance
we need not call 'defence'.

Might fox and echidna coexist?

Echidna will arise and predate
on termites when danger has passed.
You have rendered yourself outside
relevance. Processed, you dissolve.

Evidence—is it evidence?—of its presence

is everywhere. So rare to see in the open,
it has dug and overturned rocks to source
veins of termites networked through
hillsides. You track its movements
around the block via underminings
and overturnings. Heavy rocks you could
only lift with both hands and knees bent
are tossed aside: ball of muscle
not much longer than your foot,
it shifts impediments easily. Its claws
hack through concrete-hard dirt. Its tongue,
which you have not seen, is necessarily
long and sticky, reaching down
through capillaries and chambers
to the core of the earth.

Sanctus, Sanctum: A Love Poem

i.

The smallest measure of matter
leaves traces before it vanishes:
the energy lost or exchanged
in cycling out to Grantchester
is love and prayer, duotone
landscapes and seasonal osmosis:
we were there, time wound-back
like progress come unstuck,
the largest ever hole in the ozone
layer, defined against the size of America.
A spoonbill larger than life,
mythological on its perch, *dégagé* –
as it should be, we'd guess.
That's back there, where we'd
be together if conditions were perfect.
Burnt white totem of the Avon Valley,
as if "sedate order" watches over
communities and is positive
in a way we know it's not, like the Eloi
being everywhere in the English lyric,
or picnicking by an Australian river.
When the weather goes out of kilter
paragliders over Bakewell
drop as suddenly as they appear:
the spoonbill's beak's utility
becomes a rhythmic disaster:
isochronous: stress stress stress:
laneways where moisture clings
and growth meets rot and the cycle
plods its weary way. Holy, holy, holy.

ii.

That fox wrapped around
that roadsign – fashion piece
with flair, cured by the weather,
mummified. The Larrikin is in there.
Jokes about gender. Product
of nationalism, those soft endings,
para-rhymes and racism, bounties
and scalps and making a living.
Who cares? It's been up there
for weeks. People have seen it,
remarked on it: tasteless,
but then, they hold the hunt
for sheer pleasure and foxes

are despised: “they eat the livers –
livers so small! – out of chickens,
and leave the rest”. Fox spot,
Kentucky Fried Fox, Red Fox,
why the hell not? The ads
fall apart, and that’s what
selling’s all about. There’s no-one
to hear this as I mouth the words,
which reject the page,
the driving by, the twinkle
in the cavernous eyes
of a small head, teeth still shining,
needle sharp.

iii.

A band strikes up a conversation,
and it’s as if I’m there. Let’s ditch
this stuff about centuries, about
Ages of . . . and grand alliances.
It’s global chatter. I love,
I care . . . you know me.
And you know this doesn’t
give life to THEE!
Poetry is a crematorium.
Love doesn’t need it.
The Granta is thick with weed
and smart cars are bunched up
outside Lord Archer’s house . . .
what more do we need?

Lichen Glows in the Moonlight

Lichen glows in the moonlight
so fierce only cloud blocking
the moon brings relief. Then passed by,
recharged it leaps up off rocks

and suffocates—there is no route
through rocks without having to confront
its beseeching—it lights the way,
not the moon, and outdoes epithets

like phosphorescent, fluorescent, or florescent:
it smirks and smiles and lifts the corner
of its lips in hideous or blissful collusion,
and birds pipe an eternal dawn, never knowing

when to sleep or wake. They might
be tricked into thinking their time's up,
in the spectrum of lichen, its extra-gravital
persuasion, its crackling movement

remembered as still, indifferent, barely
living under the sun, or on a dark night;
climbing up you'd escape, but like all great
molecular weights it leaves traces

you carry with you into the realms
of comfort and faith.

A Version of Alcman's (fl. 630 BCE) "Sleep" poem . . .

Dormant are pinnacles and streams of the mountains,
Chasms and bluffs and crawlers fed by the dark earth;
Dormant are wild animals and that tribe of bees
And monsters out of the sea's dark syntax;
Dormant are clans of birds with wings that envelop.

The Early Onset of Darkness

Winter has little if nothing
To do with it; the first to go
Is the cloched light of the “gulley”,
Gazetted for a road, mock-hollow
Between paddock and fencing.

It is imagined foxes know
This counterpoint to light,
Awaken with day’s closing, but internally
Realise the red-orange fringe, bright
On the range’s granite edge, slow

In memory, as slow it is rapid
In recollection. And then the mid-ground
With its tapering gradient, valley
Walls balancing quadratic sound
Within the visual equation, a grid

Of darkness overlaying the canopies
Of York Gum stands and patches of parrot
Bush; the final stage is not a scree
Of crows calibrating a summit,
But bristling metal of antennas

Networking the district. Redress
Of equivocal connection, the radiant air
Inside the cells of the disconnected body,
An irritant, an afterthought, the glare
Of headlights coming out of blankness.

KIM CHENG BOEY

b. 1965

Kim Cheng Boey's poetry memorialises the past as a way of understanding experience, which for this poet has been one of ferrying between continents and cultures, between loss and recovery, present and past. His early collections *Somewhere Bound*, *Days of No Name* and *Another Place* announced him as a leading poet in Singapore, one of Asia's youngest countries. His restless spirit embarked on a self-inscribed odyssey to India, South East Asia and the United States before he established a home and an academic literary career in Australia.

Boey's memoir *Between Stations* is a poignantly interleaved series of essays on a changing Singapore, on travel as a geographic and creative pilgrimage. His lyrics in *After the Fire* and *Clear Brightness* are nostalgic, disillusioned with modernity, the persona ambulatory, positioned as transnational rather than as a postcolonial hybrid. With a Straits Chinese heritage, his cultural legacy is inextricably traced to northern Asian and Anglo-American aesthetics, and though he may be cast as a cosmopolitan the dogged individuality of his poetry unpacks their recurring themes of travel, mourning and exile almost hypnotically.

There are often labyrinthine and paradoxical flows to his narrative verse suggesting diasporic contradictions, the convolutions of history, a tendency for reversal or inversion that at times over determines the dialectic, saturating the experience with an itinerant mood that appears to evade their lived truth. Yet the tropes of eating and writing are woven with intricacy, exceptional skill and a characteristic imagistic piquancy ("La Mian in Melbourne", "Wonton with James" evidence this.) A reader of Boey will marvel at this perspicacity and be persuaded by the rhythmic force of his lyrics, by what Judith Beveridge describes as the "strict imperative, the pressure cooker that brings his breath to song."

Boey's recurring themes, their predilections and autobiographical lapses may appear impenetrable but they mediate a space of restoration. This existential and spiritual quest is imaginatively and powerfully yearned, the spectre of his errant father imbuing the past like "giddy petals that swirled/on the updraft, flared/into incandescence before curling into papery/ash." Despite their misgivings and diasporic ambivalence, Boey's poetry bespeaks gain as much as loss: "the elusive lines unlocking/a whole library of meaning"

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Archipelago

for Maria Freij

For years you hugged the coast, steering close
to the sense of loss, sounding out the landfalls, the echoes
of inlets, beaches lapped by memory's tides,
the vanished coves and mangroves, measuring
the geography of absence, erasing the cluttered skyline,
restoring the lost margins to the coast, to what
it might have been, as if mapping the meridian
of yourself, the routes that led you from the coast of forgetting
to this coast of remembering.

* * *

You have been coasting through the archipelago,
counting the islands over and over, feeling
you miss one each time or count the same island twice.
Dot joining emerald dot, you motor from link to link
along memory's reefs, rounding them up, as though you could
someday round the cape of yourself, pin
the archipelago from coast to coast in a name
that will echo like home.

* * *

From coast to coast the lines of your life stretch
as between two poles, the one that repels you
and one that draws you, what has been and what is still possible,
two hands that gather, weave, braid, the strands
pulled taut, stretched to make a cat's cradle
where lines of the past cross lines of the present, a ghostly
music in the wind, in the spectral gusts
that haunt the waters between two coasts.

* * *

Like rune stones, like beads of a rosary, you recite
the islands' names, like shells you collect, conches
you hold to the present tense, to fetch the shapes
of sounds, the murmur of waves tracing the shapes
of vanished coasts, kampongs and palm-lined beaches
where morning and evening footprints tell a different story
that the tides commit to their heart over and over.

* * *

From coast to coast the song lives

on the waveband of memory, riding past the stations
of your life, the faces and places translated
in an afterlife, like a song becoming something else
in a jazz set, taken as far as the chords can go, then
coming home, the melody arriving, the way
an old hit finds new life in a different voice.

* * *

Coast to coast the top-forty hits chart
the story of your life, one end to the other,
the island traversed in an hour's songs on the radio,
climbing in and out of love, bodies given
in music to what lives between song and song,
till what drives the music becomes what the music
drives, and you forget, you remember, you lose
and love, all stations travelled between coast and coast.

* * *

Coast-commuting you forget which coast
you are looking at and which one you are on,
the distance between stretching like a lens
that refracts what there was into what will be,
the translation turning the present tense
into the past, your life into something lived,
and you are a long reverberation in between.

* * *

Coast of the living and coast of the dead,
you never know which is which, the ocean
dreams between mixing up the voices, so that
you forget the passage, the crossing over,
where you started out from, which coast
wavered on the horizon of your leaving
and which rose to meet you in the dawn
that looked like ending.

* * *

Between coast and coast a life of crossings,
writing, erasing, rewriting, palimpsest
of passages that cancels or renews, echoes trapped
between walls, and you never know the source
of the voice; or two opposing mirrors, as
in the barber-shop, when your face diminishes,
multiplied, and you lose sight of the boy
on the barber-chair, and forget the man he has become.

* * *

On the coast where you start to say the foreign
names, the old ones start up in your head
and recite their chant, the coastal road
sewing the names together in one long curve
and the islands rise from the lightening waters and assemble
into the archipelago of clouds tracing the line
of the coast, past the beach where you stand and wave
hello or goodbye

Clear Brightness

The house and yard dressed in a skin of ash.
It was raining embers, the night air thronged
with giddy petals that swirled
on the updraft, flared
to incandescence before curling into papery
ash, as we fled around midnight, my son
bewildered in my arms, his sister bright-eyed,
exclaiming, It's snowing, Christmas just weeks away.

We sweep the aftermath like penitents, the air
acid, shriven, ashen, as it was on the day
of Qing Ming, Clear Brightness, in another life,
when families filed to the tombs with broom,
rice wine, boiled whole chicken and fruits, and stacks
of paper money, gold and silver currency
valid only in afterlife. The dead were fed,
their abodes swept, and the filial queue
of joss offered. Then the money was given
in fanned reams to the flames, transferred
to replenish the ancestors' underworld credit.
Once Grandma brought us to the cemetery,
dragging us in tow with armfuls of offerings,
filing up and down the crowded ranks
for the right address. I don't remember whose grave
it was we were tending, or Grandma telling us
to pray. Only a blurred oval photo of a man
on the worn headstone, and the hundreds of fires
around us, the air swimming
with ash-drifts, the sun eclipsed in the smoke
but its heat made more palpable by the pall
that hung over the day. I imagined the ancestors
catching the burned money like willow catkins, turning
them into real millions that they could send back
to us to bail my father out of bankruptcy.

Now grave news from the living I have left;
the cemeteries are dug up, razed, the dead
expelled, their bones unhoused, ashed
and relocated to columbaria to make
room for progress. No more tomb-sweeping
and picnicking with the dead.
No such unrest for Grandma and Dad
who went straight into the fire.
Anyway they turned Catholic
and have no use for paper money
or earthly feasts.

Here the bush is charred, the trees
splintered, pulverised like Dad's bones
after the fire. The ash taste clings
to the house, even after hosing and sweeping.
It seeps into my dreams, into the new life
I have made, and on my sleep it is still raining
ash, flakes falling like memory, on my dead settling
like a snowdrift of forgetting.

La Mian in Melbourne

On Little Bourke Street it's the bewitching hour
of winter dusk's last riffs playing
long mauve shadows down the blocks,
waking the neon calligraphy, its quavering script
mirrored on the warm sheen of the Noodle King

where a man slaps and pummels the dough
into a pliant wad. He takes a fist-sized ball
and starts his noodle magic, stretching the bands,
the sleight-of-hand plain for you to see,
weaving a stave of floury silent music.

You stand islanded from the passage
of bodies and cars, the art of *la mian*
reeling you in to a music deep beneath
the murmur of traffic, beyond the fusillade
of a siren down the street. Between here

and wherever home is the noodles stretch,
sinuous, continuous, edible songlines multiplying
into a cat's cradle of memories, the loom-work
of hands calling to the half-forgotten hum,
hunger for what is gone, the lost noodle-makers

of the country left behind:
the wanton *mee* hawker in Tiong Bahru,
the *mee rebus* man on Stamford Road,
and Grandmother serving long life
noodles for each birthday, her deft hands

pulling three generations under one roof.
The noodles were slightly sweetened to ensure
the long years came happy, not like Grandmother's
difficult eight decades, the family dispersed
at the end, the ritual of birthday noodles lost.

Now you watch the handful of hand-pulled
noodles dunked in a boiling pot, then scooped
with a mesh ladle onto a waiting bowl of broth.
You sit before it, enveloped in steam,
chopsticks ready to seize the ends
or beginnings, and start pulling them in.

Bach in Leipzig

In the exhibition poster stands J.S. Bach,
dusty and grimed, but unbroken, unscathed,
in a poise graceful, his air baroque,
as if the bombardiers wanted him saved
and sound, his lofty airs singing in their heads
as they unleashed the bombs to severe life's frail threads.

Alone he stands, lord of the rubble world
unperturbed, his heart the stone his body
is, his wig secure, his vision unblurred,
but oblivious to the century's cacophony,
to music assembled out of broken things,
to sounds made with hands on barbed strings.

Intrigued by the poster's jarring notes,
wondering who, the day after, with steady hands
could hold a camera with unshattered lens
to record how Bach survived the shots
while Leipzig toppled like a house of cards
in God's unerring sights, I join the *weihnachtmarkt's*

jovial throng. Another Christmas, post-Berlin Wall.
A season of forgetting and remembering
marked in the east by signs of renewal,
as sunken monuments rise again, and those standing
now look respectable and clean. But Bach still wears a smear,
though the cathedral behind has a new veneer.

Verwendungen is the exhibition's stark title
staring from the new town hall. On the balcony
four old men grind sad tunes, a reminder
in the festive air of Leipzig's past agony.
Turning from the carnival I climb the winding stair
eager to learn the history written there.

Scenes of before and after lead the tourist's walk
from Leipzig's baroque bloom to the Weimar's cabaret days,
coming round slowly to the hour of shock
when truth and beauty crumbled in the blaze.
Whole streets lost their names in the eye's wink.
A charred child and doll make even post-Auschwitz men think.

After the Nazi parades on the wide screens
and the Führer's tempestuous speech,
I read an account of a girl in late teens,
how on her birthday she went to teach
and came home to four corpses in their seats

ready to spring on her the birthday treats.

Then a battered door on which is etched
the silent screams of one who lived it bomb by bomb;
each day of rage, each siren cry in detached
cuts in wood. A door whose house is now gone,
preserved like the shells for public eyes,
tells the tale better than art which often lies.

A little shell-shocked I rejoin the Christmas throng.
Seeing Bach there I understand the faith
of one who said *Music is beyond bombs* after a Grieg song
performed while the rounds on Sarajevo rained, though in truth
trumpets have also brought walls tumbling down
and at the world's end again shall be blown.

Blue Note

for Win Pe

While the quivering blue note of dusk
lasts, we lie in our rooms, bound
by a common kitchen, where we sat whole days
and nights, going through Marlboro packs, the history of art
and our lives, the length of a cigarette travelling
countries, galleries, even the roads ahead.

And you sing, your voice mournful
for the first time; the phone will ring
when the dark comes
to take its place between us, the call for you
to pack and take the road to LA.

You sing the foreign songs made native
in your heart. The words you don't understand
but their sounds are familiar as the signs
on the paths of your life, the road to Mandalay,
the mountain ways of Shan, the route from Pagan
to Rangoon, the lives you may not see again.
Soon the whole world is with us, the Hebrew,
the Persian, Hindi and Serbian songs
linking hands with the *turnchyyin* of your home.

In the dark I drift on your tunes, your voice
traversing the mournful range of loss, at home
in the music, reminding I am not at home anywhere,
I will lose your songs down the road. So long
we improvised ensemble, made new measures to fill
these Iowan days, so long I played Boswell
to your Johnson, so long we drummed the table
to Glen Miller, or went all the way
with Sinatra through the night, now I falter
and the band goes dumb. Without your lead
nothing swings, no stairways to the stars.

When you say it is time, I excuse myself
for a walk and take a path we never tried,
to field of prairie grass, and notice for the first time
the stars of a Midwestern sky, their plaintive
phrasings, like the foreign songs on your tongue, saying
what we already know, what our local words
will never know. The river holds
their notes, as if it understands.
Then I walk back to your voice, to the right chord
to conclude our sessions with, knowing

I must go on improvising, and arrange
the simple melodies we made, find
new instruments, new words
to carry our songs
for soloing ahead.

MICHAEL FARRELL

b. 1965

Perhaps more than any other recent Australian poet, Michael Farrell has tested, often tauntingly, the loving struggle of meaning and chance, played out in much contemporary Australian poetry. His first full-length collection, *ode ode*, was released in 2002 and was described by poet and critic Martin Harrison as “a collection to read and re-read for its obsessions, its bricolage, its loquacious speed, its moments of downplay and its moments of ecstasy”.

Farrell is adroit and playful in his use of palimpsest and parataxis, confidently deadpan as he runs the Mallarméan gambit into O’Hara’s cinema. His poetry presses through contemporary popular culture: the regular, ritualistic visit to the cinema, the movie chat that follows; the repetitive and penetrating low thump of contemporary music; shedding genders; some drugs; “the spirit of young travolta”; “cheap peanut butter”; “breast like a coke machine”; “cameraimposed harmon/y”; “his screwy behaviour”. With one eye pinned on the tensions and torsions of contemporary poetic practice, Farrell casts punctuation and pause aside, and draws the reader into rave-like moments of a consciousness feeding on contemporary culture – as films, directors, poems, asides to modern literature, mutate and cross-generate. At other times, he presents a linguistically ready-made contemporary culture, feeding on the vestiges of a consciousness it has ransacked and enjoyed.

His is a genius of speed and chance. Cranked-up, optimistic, generously caustic and often given to enlightening moments of pathos or come-down glimpses of self-knowledge. Farrell’s work is a blitzkrieg of musicality, caprice and ambition. There is a vast energy, disciplined and chaotic, driven and a little dirty, beating throughout his work. In some old art-deco movie theatre somewhere, clutches of sweaty bodies are colliding and dancing with the same meticulous gravity and joy in the meaninglessness pursuit of fully present being as that conjured by Farrell’s cast of the dice, his careful casting of words. Given visually to the imagistic jump-cut, poetically to guerilla-like parataxis, Farrell’s work samples and dubs the music of our times as it grinds away sweetly at the limits of poetry.

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Proust Aboard a Doomed Corvette

the blue car was too slow marcel
insisted this was a virtue so we
toured the galleries gave cats lifts
painted bodies as we passed there
were some whose souls we entered
briefly & saddened like weevils
in an opened cheese remained
illdisposed to heroics haircutting
ate nothing so this is the moon
marcel remarked gloomily the life
forms are disappointing i dont
understand what god was getting at
leave god out of it i said
annoyed at last by his trilby
twitching watch the road baron
he replied there arent any moon
roads anyway i thought you
were driving out of petrol time
to abandon vessel lay low hope
a cattle farmer comes along we
can steal his wife horizon his
bitter expressions well the first
figure to come along was an army
deserter we were too sentimental
to harm we lent him a cork
shelter a phone that remembered
princes number ned kelly shrieked
mp we continued without holdups

Nude Descending a Liftshaft

she gets up removes her gender which
the mission wont require the nudes initials
arent tattooed as far as past observers
could tell were not privy its happening the
emptiness which freaks out conservatives
with their lift manuals & repertoires of
degas etcetera oh no does the operation
involve violence are the former touts
at bottom sing out nude of descending
vibrations i glanced at such a nude one
night while reading the well moonlite
the twyborn affair i descended into
the underworld of australian fiction
there are many emptinesses give me
the rough teeth the subliminal gums
the open mouth of the pub sloth
i & the visiting execs take the stairs
which afford a view of the empty city
theres nothing significant in this
conversationwise we think the nude
we hear wild animals in footsteps
some things are too heavy to carry
the invisible nude assumes a new
eroticism are there attendants first
aid givers insurance covers calmly
we await the crash with paperbacks
scoffing at the critical remarks
heard from radio news ambulance
workers secretaries so much wasted
ability a thought we read in each
others minds mentally slapping into
fictions our falls & little fetishes

Person with a Flute

when a person speaks to you in the water
a sexual interpretations available & if
they lift a flute to their lips by all means
call this suggestive there are other musics
coincidentally that day you see the first
vermeer you remember girl with a flute
called a masterpiece why would you
dispute it & if you in your ignorance
though perhaps rightly compare the songs
you heard this morning with madrigals &
fitting the words underground overground
wombling free to the tune & you compose
a poem & coincidentally & unprecedented
in your experience you remeet the instigator
that is the fluteplayer during the composition
even though youve no cigarettes to offer only
movie chat & water talk the person who entered
your emotional life & your poetic life on
the same day as vermeer seems today more
like a black & white print than sexy paint
on canvas you keep going towards the water
having gained more than lost you tell yourself
that youre not a little child youre not a little rat

wide open road

There could be anything ... elongation of a spear
Needling To a sphere they think, mind suffused with
honey, i reach out, hes a dead man,
closing the gateness behind him.
We crack the nut & Go on – Theres a Ballet in the trees
What a Cool Idea, the economy flows Like a creek
at our feet, with a few subtle body bags we ignore.
Then i realise im not wearing my red
Pin or singing
'How do you think it feels at night!'
It gives you a bad back
& a youthless appearance
Sleeping with people or sheep dogs
When the loneliness you love is in the
Eyes of someone else youre wired
We came back after a decade of
Drought the briar & burdock gone trialling new forms of
Outdoor glass – the schools are laying eggs now
Our vehicle stops
We sit on our tails
Some get pads out
Draw a blue sky
Reflectors on the inside ...
You touch a locust & have a vision
That were
Walking along a rope not
A-road the koalas Yaaawnnnnnn
For the money
Nurses cruise through pursued by reporters on trikes.

2010

HUGH TOLHURST

b. 1966

Hugh Tolhurst was born in Melbourne in 1966. Educated at Carey Grammar and Taylor's College, he went on to study at Deakin University and the University of Melbourne, graduating from the latter with an Arts honours degree in 2000. He has worked in various jobs, including as an editor for Melbourne poetry publisher Black Pepper and book reviewer for the literary journal *Heat*. He began to publish his poems in Australian literary magazines and journals from the early 1990s. His first collection, *Filth & Other Poems* (1997), reflected a diverse range of interests and inspirations: one section of the collection, 'Unfaithful Translations', is based on the poems of the classical Roman poet Catullus, while another, 'Horse Lyrics', was inspired by the music of the Australian band The Dirty Three. In the 2000s, Tolhurst has been an active figure in Melbourne's poetry performance and underground music scene. His second collection, *Rockling King*, is in preparation.

New World Serenade

Lead me on some play in your life.
An open supermarket at two a.m.
is more anonymous than an airport;
discourses flow through you, some on special.
I ate one of the Marella jubes
you find behind the orange juice,
it tasted of sugar and defiance.
Nightfill spreads long multifarious leaves;
we do the box count, change our razor blades
and scream love songs down the aisles until dawn.

Epithalamion

As the century snarls towards a full stop,
living together is frightening:
the young don't marry because they're scared.
I wouldn't do it this late
but some kids still go the whole shebang,
a couple I love did it on New Year's Day
in a clearing in the Dandenong's
as hungover as the worst of their guests,
so romantic they refused a gift,
requested a wedding poem, sweet fucking idiots.

Confessional

It was a hazy spring Grand Final day in Melbourne
when I rode to the Jesuits on a Number 12 tram;
I knew my best friend had slept with the devil,
I left her Bela Lugosi poster in pieces under my seat;
I had some sort of fifteenth century blues,
these days they call it manic depression.
What the priest made of my story is hard to say
but say they gave me a bed because I was scared,
dealings with the deluded are no picnic
and I was a long time out to lunch,
my friends had gone a little way over my head,
earlier that day, two very senior Judges
who had worked with my father drove me to my doctor.
They'd heard how I'd met the Prime Minister's daughter
while I was staying at the Prince of Wales
and they telephoned my psychiatrist at his holiday house.
I do not know if it occurred to them
that being chauffeur driven by two lords of the law
might be consistent with my delusions of grandeur
but it was; it occurred to me, when my doctor
first mentioned hospital, that he was not
quite so at ease with their Honours as was I;
I told him his verdict was alarmist,
that the weight of their positions had influenced
his diagnosis, they had perverted the course of medicine.
When my hour was up, the West Coast Eagles had won,
I tracked a chemist down in St. Kilda
then took off into retreat;
I took my first tranquillisers in a monastery,
they blurred Ashbery's *Flow Chart* and the Psalms.

Photocopies

It's alright to be alone, left to them.
The loneliness of the left hand margin
is what undulates the rhythm to write;
is ambition your sexual exile,
is my balcony a long way from sea?
You read in your words a fictional you
who sees a train town towns before the station
and clear ambivalence towards yourself
is hard to keep on the rails, hard to ride.
I always did have serious intent,
insisting how my jokes were understood
as if in love a kind of nonsense tongue
might tell separateness when to piss off.
They dream close relations, love once removed.

Fly Culture

I don't sit in cafés much, my friend,
the flash of love has fired me to a different place;
I have the ceramic loneliness of a flat
for people to come around to.
I wonder about the something or other,
slow thoughts two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen.
As for my literary tastes, there are few poets
that I have liked, I begin to like them less
as time enlarges the space between lines
I have fleetingly been excited by,
and these lines become things that excited me then
in a way that seems terribly final
but is probably cousin to the thought
that only your own poetry is exciting.
At other times I fish about the city in my face
and understand it less than I might.
I like the way I no longer like Ashbery,
as if he had made a fool of himself or those pages
I once thought memorable had been air-dropped
as small single paper balls from a passing plane.

1000 miles

You stay in Sydney, I turn thirty
killing the poem of the long sleepiness
of the Hume. Something dies in you in Goulburn:
if the wheels bite & the semis stay in lane
it stays a small thing,
less costly than a few Resch's at the RSL,
less flash than the talcum powder
bent cops exhibit while assessing the street value
of the physical evidence.
There are noughts after you,
noughts in E flat,
extradite the physical evidence.

last ride

Tenderness

always has a signature; it's just mostly
the cheques bounce.

I had a dream I was running alongside a train,
my sore back keeping pace well,

I had a dream I was running alongside a train,

I had this bad bad dream,

spent all my money on fucking Reeboks,

ran into a level crossing

& lost both my wings.

Hope

Your yellow dress wore a laughing smile
meeting you after choir practice to down Guinness
because you don't wish to bother with dinner.
Entering your room a normal human being
shocked by that which we call a bed.
Not liking you much when bored at lunchtime,
taking in the MCA, rediscovering ferry rides;
the desire to be alone with you that needs
the chance to be alone with you;
misunderstanding understanding our misunderstandings.

after Warren Ellis

There are things a violin can drag out of the air
that my lips won't attempt to circle;
waking with my lips on your breast,
waking tangled like third world politics,
waking ready for your anything.

There are things a violin can drag out of the air
that my lips won't attempt to circle;
when I sell out, I will sell out to you.
The riches of the West are somewhere in the glaze
of your eye.

Who is it smoking Marlboros out your bedroom window
with the steam coming out of the bathroom?
There are things a violin can drag out of the air
that my lips won't attempt to circle.

At the Bar

The unfinished drink for violin & orchestra,
the way patrons cannon off each other
as the Prince of Wales gets divorced
& goes for the forty something crowd.

In any crowded bar speaking English
is a woman whose laugh has an inflection
almost nothing like yours.
We were good in that movie

until they colourised the print
& yes, that wave was for a beer.

in the red

There are one & a half million people in US prisons
& with mandatory life sentences for traffick in drugs
they're growing old, they're taking lots of Panadol.
My ex crashed her Laser & can't make New York

& with mandatory life sentences for traffick in drugs
complete disasters save you from bigger ones.
My ex crashed her Laser & can't make New York
my profits don't even run to a printer,

complete disasters save you from bigger ones,
she hid his car keys in the punch.
My profits don't even run to a printer,
they cut an hour off my birthday for daylight savings.

She hid his car keys in the punch,
my headache runs right through California;
they cut an hour off my birthday for daylight savings,
the black ones now outnumber the white ones.

My headache runs right through California,
they're growing old, they're taking lots of Panadol,
the black ones now outnumber the white ones,
there are one & a half million people in US prisons.

instrumental

all kids think of suicide
like all kids think sleeping pills
might win you a day off school
for me there was dying under green trees
buried in the spring you know
the green would die greenly.

the impossibility of it
doesn't occur to you as a teenager,
the impossibility of few things
will occur before you first lose your head
over someone now less than special
but not worth the blame.

too old to top yourself
because friends are wise to you
& you are wise enough to yourself
to leave it to latin lovers in ludicrous
Almodovar films, or Japanese couples
with wilder kitchen utensils

drinking yourself to death
has more advantages than most methods;
in my green dreams of park suicide
I don't remember what the instrument was
but the grass was lush & jolly
& the bottles were red

Scratch one night & it's eight months
since my last drink with you
but walking home
is plodding on to you,
there's almost the telephone,
I called you on my birthday & didn't tell
until I needed an excuse
for being gaga at half past six.
When you came down to break horses
this one hardly got a look in
but walking home
is plodding on to you,
Crown casino suicides might be myth,
but this place has more pokies than paydays;
the state would put them in supermarkets,
the recovery from the mouths of babes.
Summer must have hit in Sydney
& I've found far too much work
but walking home

is plodding on to you

I knew it would come to this

The night we met I hid my hands
sitting next to you in the theatre
& conscious not to breathe funny,
thought I'd never done that before.
The way we were talking
we were at my place before
finer possibilities existed
& turning from talk there was this
half step & a fingertip touched your hand.
You were uncertain as to cities then,
now Sydney fades from my phone bill
as Melbourne fades from yours,
down the line you touch my hand
meaning just this

PETER MINTER

b. 1967

Since the mid 1990s, Peter Minter has caused a sensation in Australia through his exploration of the ecology that emerges where language, subjectivity and poetics meet in the texture and tissue of poetry. Minter's work has generally reinvigorated debates about poetry's function and form in Australia in terms of its relation to hermeneutics as much as to phenomenological representation. More simply, it investigates the tangled cultural and political web we are weaving when we find our way through language to touch on being.

On his website, Peter offers the following biographical details which underscore the origin of his ongoing commitment to ecologies, cultural and natural: "He was born in Newcastle, New South Wales, to a family of coal miners, sailors and fishermen – his family sharing English, Scottish and Aboriginal ancestry. He grew up in Swansea, just south of Newcastle, where from an early age he explored the shores of Lake Macquarie, learnt to fish, catch prawns and crabs with miners' lamps on new-moon nights, and surf during the days after school. At the age of fifteen he moved with his family to Quorrobolong, near the Watagan Mountains of the lower Hunter Valley, and soon took a strong interest in writing, painting and photography. He spent days wandering or horse riding through the bush, closely observing the rural and forested environment around his home, and recording ideas for his earliest stories and poems."

Minter received the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship for Poetry in 1999, and in 2000 he was awarded The Age Poetry Book of the Year for *Empty Texas*. His editorial projects include founding the Varuna New Poetry broadsheet, co-founding and co-editing *Cordite Poetry and Poetics Review* and *Calyx: 30 Contemporary Australian Poets*, and editing poetry at *Meanjin* from 2000 to 2005. At *Meanjin* he also guest-edited two special issues, 'Poetics' (60.2, 2001) and 'Blak Times: Indigenous Australia' (65.1, 2006). More recently, he has co-edited the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* and the forthcoming *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*. His work appears in wide range of Australian and international electronic and print publications, and is anthologised in *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*. He is a Lecturer in Indigenous Studies at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney, where he teaches Indigenous cultural, legal and literary studies, specialising particularly in ecopoetics and aesthetic responses to country, sovereignty and identity.

At the launch of his first full collection, *Empty Texas*, Robert Adamson placed Minter as a successor to Mallarmé, though as with Adamson's long poem 'The Rumour', the contemporary reinterpretation of Mallarmé's *jeu par excellence* has more to do with excavating cultural white noise than purifying the language. John Kinsella observed that Minter's work was 'as if David Lynch ha[d] written a screen play of the life of Alfred Jarry', while Ron Silliman simply noted its energy and grace, saying "I want to read more!"

From the testing of the lyric in his first book *Rhythm in A Dorsal Fin*, which was shortlisted for the 1996 New South Wales Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize, to the Mallarmean echoes of *Empty Texas*, up to the most recent Homeric wanderings of *blue grass*, Minter's work has remained exceptional for its ability to enter language as a landscape, to negotiate the interstices of culture and nature and to play with and deploy the conceits of poetry and the subject, often mock-heroic and sometimes unreconstructed. Within the accumulation and agglomeration of its slabs of syllabics, it continually creates a lush and organic song headlong into the fragmentation through which perception is renewed as language. Pam Brown says it best: "Peter Minter, irrational Mallarmiste for a new generation, write on!"

Another Moment in the Ongoing Development of our Hero

When you walk out
into the derangement of earliest morning,
too early, for the stars
still examine you and trees, unencumbered
by daylight, hang with sorrow
their brevity in moonlight
and the young dawn

When you light up
and look down into the broad circle
of your life, the leaves
corresponding to zones of implosion
and out there, like a storm
in the valley, a city
sparkling off the horizon
and the bromine haze on the coast

And when you stand there,
wait, the silence of the coming
spring as it seeps
beneath your feet then up into air
from all beings,
those knotted branches, roots
and harbours of flesh
calling forward into daylight
another moment of becoming
before relaxing again into common,
ongoing parlance

When you recover, undiminished
and fall again to the wet ground,
half sleeping in an acre of grasses,
the last world of snails
and insects brought closer under the nail
of the final, crescent moon,
unobserved, uncovered
by territories of doubt and attachment,
the pride of not knowing,
not seeing the way.

Melody

My wife my car my colour and myself
– there is always this measurement, his medium
in acsentia, chloroform

emetic parsimony an actual bird
absorbing the white shoulder
beak a century of protest

Look! This here abandoned
other decade,
subtracting quality from footnotes
riz then after silence, The Drunken Cricket Team 12:02 a.m. and the strata of
interiors
coil temporarily as exceptions. Ridiculous!
& then appear Unsung, lids wide open
to be push'd aside.

I've heard one makes any & this time we fold
together like grass, the grass

leaving the region
of your respiration, the spatiality of another city: Maybe
he will turn up again, unpredicated like She said

I believe You now!

This time, however, we spent the afternoon in the gardens,
feeling like a landscape,
absolutely stuffed.

Ontology Stinks

The world does not know it offers nothing.
I am meant to see a white shirt,
whale bone buttons flashing under lights,
the advice of a lissom woman
sulfur crest in green pine leaves,
my arms on her brown thigh
a cloud in the valley rising for the storm.

How to offer the shadow unmade
by three white candles, the scent
left on my open palm
by the featherless skull of a hawk,
stones above Green Cape
a spectre for trawlers
five metres deep beneath the foam.

I see her beer can balanced on an edge,
mercury on the crease by her nipple ring,
Red flower on the verge of the widow,
long hands crying in the earth.

Besides Good and Evil

i.

Two days ago
you placed my hands in a pine field,
one dream beside the other

Where our lips, our broadening eyes
compost beneath a root of skin,
where our clothes fold up

Glow quietly through the earth
while the dry green field
we wake beside each morning

Falls dim with their memory.
Starlight absorbs into powder sky, clay
opens to cool like skulls

Blown into red flowers
on our shin blades, their spinnakers
driven into clouds, into rocks;

Flailing against the weight of your head
you rise &, like a Titan from sleep
doze still above your death,

Move forward into light
& stare undiminished from the window,
metropolitan furrows

Growing resinous
as hydrocarbon fall-out rouses
ex-nihilo flowers, spitfires

In the eucalypts' trim. Such
coincidental similes forced gently
through cat shit

Thriving between
Newtown's permaculture terraces
are most unlikely, being

All of earth & mortal nature
hung along a row of black clothes,
our bodies' carbon silhouettes

Mud as dust in water.

You remember names for all the animals
& birds, sense balanced on line.

ii.

We speak about this later, garlic
mash and pomegranate
bled through the sinuous grain

Like hundreds of silver eyes
eaten crisp. This reminds me,
air had the scent of the visible

Day's late sun, a faith
seed blown over Cow Hill
in a small eloquent gale

As a storm fell over the range
to our spines, blue
up against yellow grass ends

& grey tree cores rattling,
the blackberry flowers unheard but beginning
to witness the wind shake

Leaves from leaves, stones
from their buried life like feathers'
growing up

And away from the corn fields.
What was left to say, on the hill
nearer town

We found a few things
driven before us
whorled as the top of our heads

In a cold night wind
sparky with fire & thrash, our feet
wet & singing

The last, most beautiful return
as if it mattered. Morning air is clearer then,
the kids we are becoming

Quiet as a babble
like music
in the garden, wind-chime

Nerves split adrift
over the back yard's first light—
free intricacy

Lets the fields lift easily
my hand in yours, thistles
peeling into space.

iii.

Take, Scamander, My Virginity
as if a river's name
its moisture amidst syllables

Is marrow for the soul,
our sheaf craft borne across water
like the lung's chaff seed

Flown off a dark lock
toward sea, *where the light foot hears*
you, almost twice

The water, best thing being
the way it falls
out of things, or into things

Again, tree sap
blooming into stars like a body
half 'man' half 'fish'

Hovering over the cold lake
high in the mountain
or alluvial, sifted & infinitely fine.

In water we
come back to real work, *the what is to be done*
only partly revealed.

Salt crests on the tiller,
nets cast wide & fretless there
as waves

Ride along the eye
of Horizon, a boat named sheerly
for departure

& reaching out
toward the sweep of a green round island,
land spit

We triangulate rain, dew
river and sea,
falcon brain adjusting air strata

& tension to water's
layered resistance—to speed
this wandering measure

Live through all this
material happening swift & honest
about us.

iv.

Later we land on a copse of fire,
feet doubling ash
where rocks glow plasmic in the rushes

Gleaming gold
where the highway's empty wagons
melt as they rise

Over us
&, drawn in a tongue of salt
wet flames from the head

Eat flames between arm
pits, knee-joints, eye-brows pelvic
from the soil's

Slow heat.
Skin's hallucinate indivision
its red & green

Windfall of hair
burnt as *the five flames at the end
of each hand*

Go out across the land,
begin anywhere
& return, coiled hot

As ash,
embers quincunx
over pines.

Eyes seek their acrostics,
taste buds
definitive as a nerve's

Sweet accidents
in hard roots returned to gather
dry

nets of plants.
By the hill
my syntax glows,

the world
radiates
its steady amplitude

on & off,
burns more deeply
in its waste

Living Systems

Under the dim grey sky of an early evening
in September, that mountain sky
when air rests across the surface of the world
and strays on the body like cold,
unremarkable sweat,
you question the validity of new growth,
an apparent urgency
to fresh lime leaves unfurling from the tips
of branches, knee-high grass left uncut for seeding
heavy under the pressure of damp,
point out to me the raindrops
resting on leaves of grass like indian mirrors
sprayed out across the yard.

This one, like them all,
held against the green verge by asymptotes
of gravity and friction, the fabric of living
and falling into the earth as a pebble
or circle of life
seems larger than the rest,
the dark green shadow of the world
and weight of the sky
turned as an eyeball to eyes
we bring and strain through the matter
of belonging, here, against
the matter of not belonging,
the strain of accomplishment, the names
we share and pretend again to forget.

When night falls, again,
forgetting the air that thickens
from nowhere into rain,
the raindrop gathers dark
into its gentle, impressive detail
and symmetry, the broad grass leaves
sink to the ground and emerge
as a field of black hands
sprouting from the torso and blood
and aeons of waiting for day.
We stay to see the first lamp
flicker away on the street,
eyes watching the rain as it slides
through arteries of light
to our feet, and then, to the deepening clay.

Night closes in, sea spray

Night closes in, sea spray
& spindrift
curl around my idle feet

as I walk into a tidal sweep
of stars, senses
turned inside out of place.

You read me out
as well, take me to the edge
of sleep & say

we'll make our way in darkness,
hard as skulls
made to think & feel about

the gross perpetuity of matter,
not in that fake negative sense, just
positive, here & human.

TIM ROGERS

b. 1969

Tim Rogers (born Timothy Adrian Rogers on 20 September 1969) is an Australian musician, actor and writer, best known as the frontman of Australian rock band You Am I. He is also a solo artist, and has fronted and released albums with bands The Twin Set and The Temperance Union. As of July 2013, Rogers has released 12 albums with You Am I and five solo albums.

Good Morning

If you tuned in correctly this morning
Kissed his cheek, get your tea and your toast in.
Got the greatest of the latest top thirty
To clear your mind of all your dreams unfaithful or dirty.
What would you like to hear with your soldiers?
Sponsor needs to know what you told us!
Got a course written for us straight from the file,
Just check your brain into the a.m. dial.

Waking up is easy when you got a voice you know
Rattling up the ratings on the breakfast show.
Waking up is easy when you got a voice you love
Telling you what's out there...
Is anyone out there?

If you don't like the nest that you've made
We got a competition running you can leave today.
Pack your bags, clean your ears of the city.
We got a place where even your car looks pretty.

Waking up is easy when you got a voice you know
Rattling up the ratings on the breakfast show.
Waking up is easy when you got a voice you love
Telling you what's out there...
Is anyone out there?

Good morning ladies, do you need a man?
Put your trust in our thirties and over plan.
Trust me.

Waking up is easy when you got a voice you know
Rattling up the ratings on the breakfast show.
Waking up is easy when you got a voice you love
Telling you what's out there...
Is anyone out there?

Hourly Daily

Don't let there be
Something sour in my coffee.
There's fourteen year olds
Screaming "get out of my country!"
I won't let him rise just to say goodbye
Hourly, daily.
The August cold
Brings something bad in its sock drawer.
There's too much hate
Covering up those once white walls.
I don't want my boy thinking I'm only to avoid.
Tread safe hourly, daily.

He's the splitting image and the oldest of two,
Now what kind of mess have you gone and gotten yourself into?

Make a morning pledge
To the heart of the city quiet.
Pray the daybreak sun
Can fill up the halls of a sleepless night.
Bring one good face into this house today
Hourly, daily.

He's the splitting image and the oldest of two,
Now what kind of mess have you gone and gotten yourself into?

How Much is Enough?

Would it stain
If the lights fell down on your name,
And each face began to look all the same ---
How much is enough?
Did you ever want to just lose touch with everybody you know?
In the morning
When you've wiped his taste away,
The last of the red and all the records you played ---
How much is enough?
Did you ever want to just lose touch with everybody who heard?

Did you ever want to join a collective,
Throw a party just to make sure you missed it,
Did you ever want to be a collective?

Would you sell out
To the dealer with the lowest cost
And burn every proscenium floor ---
How much is enough?
Did you ever want to get in touch with somebody you hurt?

Offered up some kind of collective
So you can never ever be left selected,
Did you ever want to be a collective?

If the lights, they fell
Do you think you could tell
Just how much?

SAMUEL WAGAN WATSON

b. 1972

Born in Brisbane in 1972, Samuel Wagan Watson is of Munanjali, Birri Gubba, German, Dutch and Irish descent. He spent much of his childhood on the Sunshine Coast before returning to Brisbane to start a career. He was the winner of the 1999 David Unaipon award for emerging Indigenous writers with his first collection of poetry, *Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight*. Since then he has written four more collections; *Itinerant Blues* (2001), *Hotel Bone* (2001), *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (2004), which won the 2005 New South Wales Premier's Book of the Year and the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize, and *The Curse Words* (2011).

"I don't see myself as an 'Australian' poet until I'm actually performing outside of Australia," writes Watson. "It's an odd way to exist. I've shared a podium with some fantastic 'Australian' poets and I understand their position. I'll never be a Les Murray. I'll never be as dedicated to the form as Dorothy Porter – but it was a pleasure to work alongside those artists! I'm more comfortable being a Brisbane writer. The muddy swell of the tides has been a good muse!"

Charles Bukowski seems a constant in much of Watson's poetry, alongside the ethos of the Beats (Watson notes in an interview he keeps a copy of Kerouac's *On the Road* close to hand) reworked to the contemporary Australia's landscape and language. 'Gas Tank Sonnets' is one example.

Gas Tank Sonnets

*1 hour out of Byron Bay
and no dreams for three days
when the snakes in the engine
hatched a mutiny*

the radiator hose was the first to go

*a roadside heart-attack,
meatball surgery with a swiss-army knife
and almost hijacked by hitchers*

*the days and days of service station pies
finally ripped through my spare tyre
and cocktails of on-edge nerves did their work*

*while all the time
across the hills, the Pacific
looking good enough to eat*

*feelings of withdrawal
leaving
Byron Bay and the muse,
for the likes of Brisbane-town
and this want of becoming a writer
tongue dragging along the bitumen*

*regurgitating yesterday's gravel,
the mind aflush
with gas tank sonnets*

Throughout his work, Watson's humour is never far off. Here, the days measured in "service station pies" might be a wink to Prufrock or more simply an example of the precision in detail and observation his poetry is often praised for. The final Looney Tunes working of his writerly ambition, hilarious as it is beautiful, his "tongue dragging along the bitumen/ regurgitating yesterday's gravel,/ the mind aflush/ with gas tank sonnets" calls to mind another of Watson's heroes, Hunter S. Thompson – perhaps it's no coincidence that the Brisbane he is escaping also goes under the moniker of Brisvegas – as well as a young Kerouac or Robert Adamson (not least in his early poem 'The Imitator').

Though he sings the praises of his muse Brisbane, he doesn't simply play out or against Romantic tropes: as he notes, the Brisbane River's waters are muddy. Watson's passion and openhearted dissection of "yesterday's gravel" creates a lyrically intense experience coupled with subtle and ingenious tamperings with the symbolic. The lived-in quality of the poems, the lyrical details of an itinerant life, its gambles and gambols, rooming houses, bloodied noses, the self-conscious and unapologetic claim of it all as part of the writer's due and lot, and the hard-won experience carved from it, make him a fitting successor to Bukowski. But his work and its importance only begins there, vested as it is in contemporary Australian politics.

Watson's gonzo and Beat passions, far from risking criticisms of being derivative or outmoded, work perfectly as a bludgeon, vehicle and song of dissent against the contemporary Australian ugliness: intransigent racism, hypocrisy and criminal smallness (of mind, heart and, if you believe in such things, soul) that guides contemporary Australian discourse and politics about asylum seekers and indigenous issues. Yet Watson does not give into rancour; his heart and humour are too large and sharp for that. Poems such as 'White Stucco Dreaming' and 'Hotel Bone', among so much of Watson's work, argue and sing through the layers of bullshit levelled out by both sides of politics in the name of economics and security. In 'Hotel Bone', Watson humanises the complexity of the lives being governed and offers the reality of community created on the margins, raising with humour the "voodoo of semantics" against the "cappuccino song" of middle Australia's retrograde conformism as well as against the populist dog-whistle politics embraced by both sides of Australian politics in the decade since the Tampa affair.

Hotel Bone

*the street resembles a neck
from a wayward guitar
with Hotel Bone sitting idle on a vein,
wedged between two frets
where the bad tunes can reach her*

*these white stucco walls, I imagine, once carried a vision of pearl
now a gourd for asylum seekers
Iraqi, Indonesian, Sri Lankan
and one crazy Aboriginal . . . who lives with a typewriter
but not with the brevity of a visa on my head, no,
my longevity was guaranteed before I was born*

*in the 1967 referendum
the freedom to practice the voodoo of semantics
within the marrow of Hotel Bone*

*existence only 2 minutes walk
from some of the best latte lounges in the city
yet white faces don't come down here
until they've been classified unfit for duty
no longer permitted upon the chorus line
of the cappuccino song
where multi-culturalism is in an airline format
first-class, business and economy seating*

*but those of us who submit to the chance of mystery-flights
end up on the tar of Hotel Bone*

*a haven from Saddam, Suharto, the Tamil Tigers
and One Nation
this Hotel Bone;*

*it is hard
it is reachable*

it is home

Early on, Anita Heiss wrote in a review of Watson's multi-award-winning collection *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*:

Much Indigenous poetry is written and indeed read because of what it has to say (rather than how it is written), because it provides the political voice that Indigenous people are denied in other areas of Australian society. Watson's writing is different, though. He has mastered the craft of writing and also says what he needs to say as a blackfella. He is not guilty of what he charges other writers with in 'Author's notes #2'. Some writers never cross beyond the second or third dimension of a page.

Watson's insights and anecdotes are personal, almost voyeuristic to the reader, his topics universal and accessible, and his language is deliciously seductive.

Seductive and, like any good seduction, perhaps, a little unsettling of the received positions unwittingly accepted as the norm and sufficient. Watson's poetry embraces the complexity of contemporary Australian discourse and identity, which, reduced and stupified by the Howard years, seems little improved by the Gillard year. Alongside poets such as Ali Cobby Eckermann and Lionel Fogarty, Watson is one of the key voices in the reassertion and resurgence of contemporary indigenous Australian poetry. That said, Watson speaks for a broad cross-section of contemporary Australian experience, traversing and speaking to the faultlines that make a rich country like Australia such a troubling and troubled place.

Watson has said, "I suppose I look at all of these poems I've written as like they're the Polaroids, come out of my head, through my eyes and I'm taking photos." That combination of instantaneity and singularity (perfected posthumously by the Polaroid in the digital age) is a good analogy for his work. His writing

reframes lived experience often by embracing its headlong moment and momentum, while offering in the re-reading the chance glance captured and relived, details that might have been overlooked, connections that should be apparent. Through these he offers the vital signs of Australian society and community, showing that they are far from being one and the same thing.

Watson has toured overseas and held residencies on the Australian Broadcasting Commission TV's *Sunday Arts Show*, in Indonesia during the Utan Kayu Literary Biennale and in the community of Yarrabah in North Queensland. His poetry has been translated into German, Norwegian and Bahasa Indonesia. Watson's opera *die dunkle Erde* (The Dark Earth) premiered in Brisbane in 2004 and again in 2005 for the Brisbane Music Festival. It is the story of a German vampire who gets a taste for Aboriginal Dreaming. His poetry has been adapted into animation with the support of the Australian Film Commission and a short documentary by Brisbane filmmaker Helen Kassila, entitled 'Bound in Bitumen', has won acclaim within the arts-festival circuit. In 2010 he received the National Mental Health Award in Media Awards for his work as a writer/script developer for 98.9FM Murri Country radio and for "educating wider audiences on the plight of Indigenous Australians living with mental illness".

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Back Road

revisiting childhood through that time-gauze of greying feather,
back to a time
when the road seemed wider
but had the same volume of insanity

Dad always concrete at the wheel
Mum in the "Worry" seat
sharing with Dad,
the worries sometimes reaching the backseat
as the sporadic vapours got too heavy
and did their backdraft thing
upon our small foreheads
breathing in the pockets of blackness

yet, we ride
our little bodies fading into the upholstery

the rear-view mirror
keeping its eye on us

Smoke Signals

I remember construction cranes like herds of frozen praying-mantis, high on the steamy Bjelke-Petersen plateau above a brown snake-coiled river. It was from this view, at the age of 4, that I learnt to read the columns of Brisbane city. And from this view, I came to recognise the segregation of *Smoke*. *Black smoke* darkened the blue-collar suburbs, covering the workers in burnt-rubber cologne. Black smoke was saved for industrial accidents, or when a lower-income family had their fibro-lined house smothered in winter flames. But white smoke; white smoke plumed from chez-nouveau, white-collar fire places. White smoke belonged to European engines with a smooth choke. White smoke stayed behind the construction cranes where I imagined a life that would never depreciate. A place where little children weren't scared of the dark. Beyond the white smoke was where I thought I would discover the *Lucky Country* . . .

*High-rises dictate
A crow punctuates the sky
Clouds await error . . .*

Parallel Brisbane

“the journey IS the destination”
a quote from a great traveller

Brisbane is a small city, but that’s OK . . . ’cause I don’t need much room to move . . .

My domain is on the south-side. I get all my fuel from Logan Road. Logan Road is the main artery of my being. This is where my story begins . . . and will one day peacefully end. The ghosts of my Indigenous and European ancestors share spiritual communion on the length and breadths of this stretch. Although their cultures and journeys ran parallel in the past, the gridlines that form my identity were eventually meshed. Mum and Dad found each other in high school, in the shadow of Mt Gravatt, by the shifting skin of Logan Road. Their love is still as deeply entrenched as the tramlines under Central.

I frequently lose myself here, in the best place I will ever know. In the belly of a bus, the song of the engine’s celeste, easily moving in and out of traffic, the regulated stops between Garden City and Woolloongabba, punctuated by the footpaths, the parks and corner stores where I have purchased my ingredients of the Dream . . .

Too Many Secrets

I can't sleep here, on this Wiradjuri land; upon this hill of learning. Awake until the sun comes up and the morose voices subside; the dawn light blades whispers back into the creases of scarred country. I can't sleep here, in the writers centre; a beautiful place with so many bright voices that burn into the night, spectral sages cloud my ears like moths to a flame. Too many secrets here; ceremony ground now a university. There is too much information in this place here, singed, black pages that the granite boulders relay in monolithic volumes. Tumbleweeds spin and stutter. The air licks with a cold wet mouth that bears the driest parables . . . I just can't sleep on this beautiful soil that was sung . . . and sewn with too many secrets . . . Even by the daylight hours, in the peppered corners of the cottage, tirades in session and ghosts forging motions. Outside, vicious birds swoop across the battlefield, picking at the skins of audible shadows . . .

Dark fruit on the tree

One, two, three, four five and six

Seven crows singing . . .

The Alphabet Fish

My brothers once showed me the bounty that could be had in bait nets / we
were able to catch garfish / bills like half-baked marlin / the rounded quill with a
fluorescent orange head; pencil fish, that's what the old diggers called them, and
yes, how we had to pen our stories well to con the bait shops into a sale / the
confusion in the net / fish all crossing each other / locked in panic / bodies
woven to create a multitude of silver letters / many X's . . . T's . . . J's . . . C's /
mouths popping, nitrogen starved O's how a young summer whiting, tail flared,
once looked the perfect Y / an eel, the picture of a feverish S / we'd pour
everything onto the recycled paper surface of Donnybrook's brown sand / the
catch a moving paragraph / a funeral notice maybe? / punctuated with the black
spots of toadfish / the harpoon of a nervous stingray an exclamation mark / edited
before the deadline of a sunset tide . . .

Mosquito coil

Evenings on the mangroves

Boyhood memories . . .

The Night We Lost Charles Bukowski's Voice

For Rhan . . . wherever you are, Brother, I pray your path is a good one and without crossroads . . .

It was a dark and stormy night of clichés! The rain coming down, drowning the shadows, and my motley crew, well, that hotel room just couldn't hold us. We threw everything into a black sports-bag; cigarettes, hotel stationery, the little shampoo bottles, an expensive bottle of malt whisky and a cassette of Charles Bukowski reading his poetry at UCLA . . . Off we went into the dampness of the streets, looking for a party. It all went pear-shaped though in a cab on George Street . . . We witnessed the filth chasing a black man I knew . . . We ushered him into the cab, only to be surrounded by imposing uniforms as the windows of the vehicle growing foggy, like a 'greenhouse' effect; the winter of our discontent . . . Is this how a goldfish views our world?

Anyway, the cabby 'hated coppers!' he said, flew through traffic and a red light . . . And that black-fella, he jumped us all eventually, owing the \$20 he pledged to ferry us across the River Styx of our evening . . . How black the night looked when that taxi-driver cut us loose . . . We death-marched backed into town, and with our last few dollars howled vodka, deep throat echoes into shot glasses . . . But the bartender could smell the whisky in the bag . . . We didn't screw the lid on tight enough?! He quickly asked us to leave; the ol' 86er! Whisky leaking all over the Charles Bukowski cassette and drowning his voice forever . . . how ironic?

I eventually had to crawl home through the soppy train yards and weeds . . . Falling into an open sewer, ripping my shirt on bits of exposed metal shards . . . Stared up at the lights of the city and smiled, thirsty . . . thirsty . . . thirsty!

*Empty vodka glass
In the 3am city
Alley cat meow!*

Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheat Board/Iraq Bribery Scandal

*“The call of the strange bird is heard
on the pipe of the breathing floor;
so high will become the bushels of wheat
that man will cannibalise his fellow man . . .”*
Nostradamus, circa 1568 (Quatrain 75)

We learn, yet forget, in the cataclysm of our birth
the owl songs of Muk Muk;
the death feather, reacquainted we will be again
in the sunset of our mortality.
(The call of the strange bird is heard . . .)

The dijeridoo sits in the corner of my room
near the window, ghosts breathe
my frailty of spirit
resonates in the acoustics of this gouged plain.
(. . . on the pipe of the breathing floor . . .)

The dark skin ripped apart
perished seeds of the Dreamtime
to the new crops of the Invader;
blood furrows this occupied soil of neo-pestilence.
(. . . so high will become the bushels of wheat . . .)

Harvested by the demon-seed of the Invader,
and grain-fed the insatiable hunger of the Dictator
they danced, until caught red-handed
the hands bite the hands that have fed them.
(. . . that man will cannibalise his fellow man . . .)

Brunswick St Blues

Brunswick St
sits like the continental shelf just below morality

rain washes the bad scenes
off the street
the killers still get the air
for free
yet upon the working girls
the evil shadows linger

while the decision-makers bottle the blood
and facelift the Valley

Voodoojack waits at the end of Brunswick St
like some kind of licorice addict;
paved bitumen runs straight into his mouth,
congested with exhaust fumes
and scummed in the beard of night

whistling through blackened teeth
like some patron saint of the red-light militias
that perpetuate the Brunswick St blues tune

a black singing snake gripped by the neck—
can't bite back

White Stucco Dreaming

Sprinkled in the happy dark of my mind
Is early childhood and black humour
White stucco dreaming
And a black Labrador,
An orange and black panel-van
Called the '*black-banana*'
With twenty blackfellas hanging out the back
Blasting through the white stucco umbilical
Of a working class tribe,
Front yards studded with old black tyres
That became mutant swans overnight
Attacked with a cane-knife and a bad white paint job

White stucco dreaming
And snakes that morphed into nylon hoses at the terror of Mum's scorn,
Snakes whose cool venom we sprayed onto white stucco,
Temporarily blushing it pink
Amid an atmosphere of Saturday morning grass cuttings
And flirtatious melodies of ice-cream trucks
That echoed through little black minds and sent the Labrador insane

Chocolate hand prints like dreamtime fraud
Laid across white stucco
And mud cakes on the camp stove
That just made Dad see black,
No tree was ever safe from tree-house sprawl,
And the police cars that crawled up and down the back streets,
Peering into our white stucco cocoon,
Wishing, they were with us . . .

Jaded Olympic Moments

for Jennifer Cullen

they made their way through the sliding-door
and stole the lot
video, mini-disc equipment, fly-fishing reels, my son's piggy bank
and my literary award
all on the eve of the Games
capping off a sterling period of post-funeral melancholy
after my young cousin's passing

then, sitting on Jen's couch
as the ochre-kissed women came out
and did their thing in the center of the stadium
we had tears in our eyes
thinking, that's our mob!

but no,
only a romantic would think that
it's still very much an us and them kind of deal in this
modern dreaming,
we're city people without a language
and some of us have even less

but then the coppers rang
said they'd caught them
three smack-head white boys
18, 19, 20

the gear was gone without a trace
the video, the piggy bank, the literary award
and it made sense
'cause if blackfellas had broken into the house
they would've taken Dad's 10 ft. Landrights flag

'cause it was worth just as much
as Cathy Freeman's gold

Cloud burst

for TS Eliot

Cloud burst, and another sky falls. A blight of sun causes all feather to lose flavour in the wind. But our children will still have their mobile phones and dial the clouds in angst of predator drones. The crows are gone and broken windows only catch the breaths of dying trees. No matter how sorry the horizon, a child's foresight will always wonder of the beauty in a falling sky.

'Look Mumma ... a death bird!'

But Mumma doesn't look at the sky since it has soured. Mumma takes a peg and pins a damp sheet to the flimsy clothes hoist. Mumma counts the kinks in the wire and measures her own life – line.

*'Mumma can't look now baby,
there may not be any sunlight tomorrow ...'*

And then Mumma takes the small child inside their shelter, abandoning the weathered fabric to subtly dance alone; it could be tomorrow's death shroud?

*And this is the way the world ends,
And this is the way the world ends,
And this is the way the world ends.
As the clouds quietly burst,
Not with bang, but a lethal breeze.*

*The sky is falling,
ghosts take shelter in shadow
and the air cries foul ...*

The Dusk Sessions

The pyromaniacs of the gods were kicking it into that desert sunset
Upon a fire-pink, burner-blue horizon line

Blossoms cherry red
And naked solar flares drowning into hibiscus hell-flowers
Dancing a wake for the dying light
Above a necropolis of mulga and Spinifex

Fuelling until darkness,

When the tourists overdose on shooting stars
And the lark of min-min lights
On the petals of midnight bloom,
As the ghost-riders take up watch

Illuminated into the pitch
By the sun-bleached bones
Of dry-spell roadkill . . .

JUDITH BISHOP

b. 1972

Judith Bishop was born in Melbourne in 1972. She has studied and traveled extensively, earning an MPhil. in French Literature from Cambridge University, a Masters of Fine Arts (poetry) from Washington University at St Louis, U.S.A., and a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Melbourne.

Bishop's poems have been widely published in Australian and international literary journals, and she has won several awards including the Australian Book Review poetry prize (2006), and the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship in Poetry Prize (2002–4). Her first collection of poem *Event* was published in 2007. Her other publications include translations of French poetry and scholarly articles in the field of Linguistics. She works as a linguist at a speech technology company in Sydney.

Definition of a Place

where the slow-pulsed creek grips a handful of ibis, and wattle trees feed at the periphery of yellow. Here we might have seen the iron girders of a bridge holding up the shallow arc a bomb of swallows pitched under. Or, later, air acquiring a rift white butterflies moved over in the early afternoon. There was something, yes: but not a rent apparent to the eye, not a cloud breaking, nor the way a cloud amassing shreds a tumbling skein of light.

A rusted carriage wheel half-jutted from the mud. The metal mattered in that place, a graph sown in the earth. Fertility, but of another order from the one that's often reckoned, the human and inhuman knitted in the summer heat.

This is where we talked. You turned to me a troubled cheek, the air tore, it was done. The rift, which had no other work, became the thought of sex in us. Quickly we spoke, and as quickly, it was done.

“And the Clouds Cleared the Sky ...”

And the clouds cleared the sky in half an hour, and the high,
efficient winds didn't lift a dried leaf

or brush a sparrow's wing, but caused a white dress and pine table
(white pine, the table dressed) to shine much more acutely, just as if

each form exploded and reformed, or blurred its outline then
resharpened at a higher resolution; or as if our

resolution was a matter of the light, or the timing of those changes
no one owns, but all absorb; as though the sun

didn't vivify and soften every hour: that this mattered, let alone
called up a joy, which meant a life, which meant

its ending, soon or later; which emboldened both of us—

After the Elements

You and I, we are too far
from fire now: the chimney-pots
have driven out their smoke,
and stood alert for its return,
but flames are rare, or else
they are disaster; our rooms in brick and board
have insulated from the wind
our blood and voices,
so that neither moves inside the wilder air—
those bands of warm and cold, force
and impetus or null
that comes when two great streams oppose
and cancel out; we are
too far from water now, both you and I,
the green of dissolution kissing
wrack to wrack, sun
crisping to the glitter
of the stars; for in the water, night
comes soon, and in the water, there are bands
of cold and warm, and in the one
you die, and in the other, live
but briefly, you and I;
we are too far from earth,
and when we lie down on the grass,
the palm a star, a shadow-bed,
we'll never know if under us
there creep the fossils of a youth
who died and slumped beneath the earth,
and earth has moved across
his thorax and his thigh; until the air
we are too far from, though within
its stale caress, had brushed the last
of sandstone from his eyes,
and took from bones
the oxygen they kept,
that entered time as expiration,
and enters us as breath.

for Gustaf Sobin, 1935–2005

How to Speak of Love

Not without a trace of bitterness;
or else, with the susurrus of bees in clover understood
and present in your voice. The word *love*
spelled deception at its coinage.
Its path to redemption,
a hardy self-awareness with a rock in each fist. Yes,
make yourself a diamond of the man who lies beside you,
but the word cannot be blind to what it had:
it still adores the boy whose virgin mouth you tongued
and coveted. It sees, holds, the gentle man
with whom you kneeled at last
in namelessness, and broke;
and could not bleed.

“The Chords of Snow Melting ...”

The chords of snow melting are unheard, perhaps, by any but the bird,
attuned with all its body

to the sawings of a grass blade or a seed falling from its flower head,
meaning danger, or future,

or the wind slowly gathering in force.
But see the snow—how in melting, it clarifies.

A pitch, low or high, must be sung by water molecules uncoupling
small attractions, gaining force and mutual distance.

Restless one, I know.
The songs we're singing are as clear.

JANE GIBIAN

b. 1972

Sydney poet Jane Gibian's work offers the fine rich silt and lace of urban dreaming. Her poetry traverses the inner-landscapes of contemporary urban existence, interlacing a meditative poise, an intellectual and emotional depth free of pretension or affectation, dry humour, a quick and sharp wit, and an equally sharp and poised eye for detail. Gibian's world inhabits the edges of a modernity run wild, beyond itself. Her work is marked by its ability to enter into experience with the clarity, lucidity and most of all, the open honesty of a mind freed from its burden of dissimulation and ego, leaving the rough and confused edges of the world to gather a stark truthfulness plainly spoken.

Gibian's work is the slow progression of detail, the unfolding of the phenomenal world into its intricacies, often leading to the uncertain moment of the self arriving from its journey through things once more to itself:

*On this slate-grey
autumn morning
the lake is
a churning sea
choppy & clouded,
the tortoise tower
rising still & ghostly
in the distant centre;
too cold now
for embraces
on the concrete
benches, but
starkly beautiful:
branches bend
to flutter
their leafy fingers
through the soupy
green water. In this
chilling greyness
ask yourself: if
your heart
was planted
what would it grow?
(‘planted’)*

Not a word is wasted. Every gesture brings with it a “thickening of chords”, wherein the depth of the world, the tight bud of its intricacies is closely followed, while uncertainty and the meaning of things becomes immense. Many of Gibian's poems develop contrapuntally, drawing a sensual delight in the world's fecundity into a deepening sense of its mutability. What sets Gibian's work apart is its strange, subdued music that is able to manifest the “uncertain secret” of the moment of consciousness.

Gibian's poetry moves lightly, almost haunting the solidity of the world as it engages its natural and urban architecture. She is a deft operator of language, her smallest movements moving out in tides that slowly engulf the reading and the reader, catching us unaware if we do not pay close attention to her wile, or are too readily soothed by her music. Years ago, at a reading she once warned the crowd that the following poem was short, so "you'd better pay attention." It was good advice. A touch of languour, an occasional malaise, moments reluctantly surrendered to joy, the world's immensity caught in its details, and an unearthly music form the better part of Gibian's so far small but remarkable oeuvre.

*Now your tongue forks into four:
one part for being good-natured
 one for lamentation
 the third part of irony
and the last for an imaginary language
(‘parts of the tongue’)*

© Michael Brennan

Planted

On this slate-grey
autumn morning
the lake is
a churning sea
choppy & clouded,
the tortoise tower
rising still & ghostly
in the distant centre;
too cold now
for embraces
on the concrete
benches, but
starkly beautiful:
branches bend
to flutter
their leafy fingers
through the soupy
green water. In this
chilling greyness
ask yourself: if
your heart
was planted
what would it grow?
You imagine
exquisite blossoms;
a verdant tree,
but before you
can stop it,
your heart has
grown a plant
of strange flowers,
obliquely alluring
but covered in
thorns that wound
at a touch: the lake
stills completely
glassy like worn
stone & almost
unreflective.

Parts of the Tongue

A predilection for stone fruit
sees a trail of peach
and plum stones in his shadow
You had traced him down
this discreet path to where
his casual touch
 was six light insect
feet on your forearm

In the magazine you read about
the ten sexiest women
for April; they all live
in suburbs beginning with W
and wear impossible shoes

You hunt for modern equivalents
of *One hundred ways with mince*
and watch his hand become
refined under its wedding ring,
the fingers longer and nails less bitten

He coaxes your shoulders straight,
uncurling them with firm hands

but you were merely bent over
with laughter
Now your tongue forks into four:
one part for being good-natured
 one for lamentation
 the third part of irony
and the last for an imaginary language

You move to a newly-invented
suburb beginning with X
where you will use the four parts
of the tongue with equilibrium

Poem for Dissolution, Poem for Distraction, Poem for Retrospection

POEM FOR DISSOLUTION

look how the land here
warps reluctant to snap
back into the jovial rounded
figures of children's
drawings that constitute
some collective reality despite
a paucity of evidence

here the thick air aches
with the weighted alluvium
of memory clotted like souring
milk each figure
of speech derailing her
ties to the real some tenuous
thread of rotting velvet ribbon

and apathy stuns like concussion
as we sit before the postcard-blue
horizon watching time disintegrate
with a resounding click

POEM FOR DISTRACTION

waking at this half-lit hour you lapse
into the incredulous body
of early morning, cool with languor
& stillness
there is soon
the retreat into half-dream, your
semi-permanent shell following
the journeys of waking
with gradual daring

in this striated orb
your suddenly immodest body
is drawn to another: gravitates
towards the plane of his moving
in an almost collision of the senses

such precision now in the casual
singe of skins brushing

together with devastation when
the new morning splinters

open like surrender

POEM FOR RETROSPECTION

that afternoon the past dragged
at your heels, trailing
in the wake of your footprints
and coating the door-handle
with a sticky substance

it has stroked your bony shoulders
with knowing grooved fingers,
melting into scuff marks
upon a wooden floor

this day;
when recollection
stabs like broken glass
into the palm when
your thumb is laced with mandarin,
the spacious scent ricocheting
through layers of time and
the clarity of vision
is unrelenting

Vessels for the Lapse of Time

1. Nested squares

What could be held in a month
of your calendar, in the pleached grid
of those windows, that spills out of mine
like water overflowing the rectangular

depressions of an icecube tray? A day
melts and stretches lazily into evening
in the sudden summer, and we place
our palms flat against the sun's captured

heat, coursing from brick walls along
each street: from here each day's
a window, lined up in a crooked row
like teeth inside a laughing mouth.

Flattened grass in the shape of our bodies
was still there the day after: we tried
to hold those days in cupped hands
but they trickled slyly through your fingers.

Walking past a window uncovered
to the night, that flash of someone's life
added to the inventory of sights
I collected to make you smile, an answer

to the compressed biography of postcards,
bound to the span of time in its nested
squares. Daylong we crossed disputed
territories, daylong I looked into

the battered rectangle of a pocket mirror
with its cracked corner and saw myself
divided. In the calendar's endless fretwork
you give each part of the day equal

thought; weight them evenly in your grasp,
until it's time to pull at a thread in the day
and watch it unravel behind us.

2. Helicoid

From the cracked bowl of the morning
rises a roaring sea in your left ear, the helical
pulse unfurling into time passages made

convoluted by fingers tracing a slow

orbit around a breast. Taking an old stethoscope
from the table you heard the loud whispery

edges of your heartbeat; listened for
the murmurous parts of that country
absorbed awkwardly inside, down

to the intricate whorls of your knuckles,
like distorted incense spirals. In this vessel
rests a memory of eating rice picked

three days earlier, smoothed grains
in the coarse capsule of a sack, so recently
bound in curved terraces of wet rice

stretching in tiers towards the horizon;
the taste of earthiness and pith sparking
tender florescence in the reverent

chamber of the mouth. With a word balanced
on the tongue comes simultaneously
its echo in another language, coiled

beneath, entwined with an older image;
the round edges of a biscuit tin decorated
with english birds: pheasants, demure

water fowl, a robin; and the helix of the present
winds more tightly; three inseparable baskets.

Vocabulary List: Upper Intermediate

wrist: the part of the arm between the forearm and hand

delicate: fine in texture or quality, like most of your clothing; sensitive, requiring great care or caution; your mysterious pieces of underwear — *do not have the water too hot for your delicates*

reap, harvest: to cut grain with a sickle or a machine; to get as a return — *to reap large profits*; when will I reap what I have sown; gathering of crops, a crop of yield

telescope: an optical instrument for making distant objects appear nearer and larger, the way you do for me; to slide together, or into something else, in the manner of the tubes of a jointed telescope; how you make stories from the newspaper bigger and more alive

bracelet: an ornamental band; circles your delicate wrist; *colloq.* a handcuff

narcotic: having the power to produce narcosis; any of a class of substances that blunt the senses, relieving pain, and in large quantities producing complete insensibility, often used habitually to satisfy morbid appetite; I would blunt my hungry senses if I could; am I too morbid

ingredient: something that enters as an element into a mixture; goes into our cooking, goes into our longing — *the ingredients of a cake*

telepathy: communication between one mind and another by means other than the normal use of the senses

invent: *to invent a machine*; to produce or create with the imagination — *to invent a story*; to make up or fabricate as something merely fictitious or false; why does it feel like you are inventing excuses

relic: a surviving memorial of something past; an object having interest by reason of its age; the body part or some personal memorial of a saint or other sacred person, preserved as worthy of veneration, like the way I carry your bracelet with me, a handcuff to my pain

reliable: that may be relied on, trustworthy — *reliable sources of information*

rehearse: to perform (a play, part, piece of music etc) in private by way of practice before a public performance; everything till now has been only a rehearsal

yield: to give a return, as for labour expended; to surrender or submit

Slow-Motion Love Affair

Around you is an infinite
thickening of chords; you grow
dense with pale scripts like
children's breath; a thousand minute
inflections from his voice
and eyes and hands, this
precarious uncanny balancing.

Each touch
laden with intricacies, continuous
as the crumpled yellow gum blossom
falling ceaseless to coat the drying
clothes, the damp red paint;
a subdued epiphany of slow-motion.

tidemark

you begin here: part of a distant beach
missing its home, a doll's saucerful
of the cleanest sand sleeping in your ear

grown into something with glairy edges,
a tidemark advancing and receding less
with the disintegration of arctic sea ice

affirmed when you accidentally cut
the pale baby capsicum forming inside
its dark red mother, the centre of a world

to turn around: beneath the surface
dark rocks loom in the glassy water,
further out, mutable peaks of white froth
tease your eyes with dolphins

where you end: that part of the beach
pining for home, and at the centre
an instrumental continuo around which
all other voices circle and rub

2011

In October

the harsh wind blows particles of red dirt
into your eyes; the farmers' rich topsoil
floating to the edge of the city's centre,
to you, in the fog of actionless thought.

Yellow pollen and the hearts of spring flowers
blow too, filling your chest with petals and grains
that swirl in the lungs' wheeze. Your yoga teacher
won't do the headstand today, his nose filling

like a drain. The fitful wind gives way
to storm, and rain lashes the window;
bells clanging listlessly. At the gym
people on jogging machines move

up and down in waves, as if fleeing
something terrible, their faces grim masks.
Van Gogh's sunflowers sway on the wall,
their black centres following your gaze

to the useless pieces of everyday life
gathered here on the table, impossible to sort
or classify: your eyes hold briefly a belt buckle,

a paper clip, an unread newspaper. You don't
resist the october wind, the larger plans
of red soil, the hearts of flowers.

Six Haiku

easy silence
taking the bunch of keys
warm from your hand

just over there
both ends
of the rainbow

tiny winter apples –
she hands me dipping salt
in a scrap of maths homework

on the street of hairclips
buckets of pink crabs
boil in their shells

crowded streets at dusk
a single shirt dances
on the rooftop

outside the temple
buying a white bird
to set free

As I Write

My mother told me always
keep your own bank account —
I called it my running away
account — I can't stand
his footsteps in the house
as I work; I have to walk
out into the fields where
ghosts from the goldmine shafts
hover amongst the weeds —
back then I was stronger;
with my first I went into labour
on the mountain slope,
and finished rounding up
the cattle — but he's very good,
gets his own breakfast
and all — yet sometimes
I can't breathe when his
thoughts drift through me
as I write —

Mesmerise

with the day's end approaching,
how you stare so long
into this assemblage of flowers
is our uncertain secret:
their soft scarlet architecture
mesmerising in its solidity,
observing you like minor
stars, showering absolution
on your troubles: you are
the flowerbud straining open,
new crimson almost bleeding
through the tight green sphere,
till their quiet deaths unnerve
like half-remembered nightmares,
and the second hand never pauses
on the clock above the flowers;
you move lightly in the arc
of their hot velvet gaze

MIRIAM WEI WEI LO

b.1973

Miriam Wei Wei Lo was born in Canada, raised in Singapore, and has lived in Australia since 1993. She is of Chinese-Malaysian descent on her father's side and Anglo-Australian on her mother's side. Lo's poetry explores family, home and heritage, unfolding the histories that underwrite the everyday realities of living in relation to others in the intimate space of the family and within the broader context and "tangled knots of ethnicity and nationality". Her poetry explores family histories with openness, sincerity and a gift for characterisation, giving detail and depth to the conflicts and prejudice, nurturing and love, of the strong women of her family.

In an adroit sequence of poems tracing her family's history from country Australia, China, and Malaysia, Lo's formidable grandmothers Liang Yue Xian and Eva Sounness are vividly present. Coming into focus through Lo's work is a deeper portrait of the ethnic, cultural and political divisions and contradictions from which contemporary Australian identity evolves, as well as a vital and realistic picture of how the minutiae of culture and identity reshape us over generations. Lo's more recent work celebrates the present moment of love, embracing the daily and domestic metamorphoses with clarity and passion.

Lo has studied writing at the universities of Western Australia and Queensland. Her first collection, *Against Certain Capture*, won the West Australian Premier's Prize for Poetry in 2005. Her output over the last five years has been small, due to her radical commitment to intensively personal child-rearing, however, the poems she has produced have been widely anthologised, appearing in collections such as *Over There: Poems from Singapore and Australia*, *Windchimes: Asia in Australian Poetry* and the most recent *Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry*. Miriam currently lives in Margaret River (Western Australia), and when she is not writing, she cooks, cleans, edits her husband's sermons, and entertains three young children. Her next book is forthcoming with Salt Publishing.

Through this "radical commitment" Lo's work extends to an acute interrogation of contemporary domestic and familial spaces and relations. She comments, "It really bothers me when anyone fails to see the value of this work, but I constantly encounter people who see housework as 'less important' work; these are the people I meet in Singapore who assume that housework and child-minding are 'maid's jobs', these are the people in Australia who can't understand why I don't hire a cleaner and put the kids in daycare so I can get on with being an academic or writer, these are the societies whose views of the importance of housework are reflected in the amounts they pay to people who do these jobs for them, so they can be free from 'everyday life' to do . . . more important things (whatever they are). OK, if Kevin Rudd had to wash the dishes after all his parties, or if Barack Obama had to keep the White House clean, they wouldn't have time to do much else, but there was a reason for Gandhi's famous assertion that politicians ought to clean their own toilets. It is in this context that 'everyday life' has become a charged topic for me and for my writing."

Three Love Poems

SAND

The sound
of one grain of sand
falling softly

upon another
is the sound
of our love.

A slow accumulation of days
lying cheek to cheek
in the smooth curve of an hour glass

or wild perhaps
on a beach
raked by wind and fierce waves.

WATER

The certainty of water
is that it slips through the fingers

so

let us hold each other loosely
as we drink.

LIGHT

Let us hold each other tightly
knowing this light that we stand in
is a slow burning
that fuses the bones together,
a forge that will melt us, silica-bright,
to wink in the sand like water
caught like glass, caught like flame.

Searching For Words

Our bedsheets never really needed washing before. Could have had them on for months and they wouldn't get as dirty as they do after one day with David. Sand. Biscuit crumbs. Bits of banana. When he has a cold, smears of snot. As if our bed were a giant handkerchief. A catch-all. Like the Chinese term for bib: [*wei dou dou*], which means, literally, to cover or protect everything, to enclose or surround. Except it's colloquial.

The term. Can't find it in the dictionary. It's what the Taiwanese lady at the local fruit and veg calls a bib, in her language alive and kicking like the baby in her belly. She smiles as she stands on a crate, reaching up for the cucumbers, stopping to shift the tomatoes, the hands that lovingly lift soft fruit sometimes coming to rest on the bulge beneath her shirt, as if she were patting it into place, like some strangely quivering melon.

There is an art to arrangement. Ripe peaches on top. Grapes sit next to bananas, and beside the bananas an embankment of naval oranges, imported from Spain. I think about this as I survey our garden. To the right, the neat order of the semi-circular bed, clipped African box, everything curves and symmetry. To the left, the madcap riot of the vegetable patch, feral watermelon threading its way through the mesclun lettuce.

Perhaps it's colloquial. Most of the vegetable seedlings brought in from the shops get chewed up by slaters or snails. What survives comes up from the compost. There must be a word for this. Something not just belonging to everyday speech, but specific to a time, a place. Something idiomatic. Like the precise shape of a pregnant woman's belly. Like the state of our bedsheets after David's been in them one Thursday afternoon, sand, biscuit, banana, and snot in cunning arrangement—an unforeseen gift, given with intention and the grace of reckless abandon.

Fruit in Season

1: EATING LOQUATS IN THE SPRING RAIN

Ripe at last. The spindly nondescript tree
at the front of the church has finally taken some colour:
small yellow moons in clusters, Chinese lanterns.
Rain stammers down like bursts of praise
from a hesitant tongue.

Orbs of pale sunlight, lightly furred skin
gives way to melon sweetness. Smooth brown seeds
spit out on the pavers like stones. Sticky-fingered,
the youngest child gobbles, calling out: "More, more!"
Nothing but happiness.

2: WHAT RHYMES WITH . . .

peaches? Beaches. A peach of a beach.
Gracetown in summer. A soft fur of heat
over bodies. The water, icy. Exploding
gently on legs as fruit in the mouth.
Sand the texture of peach stone: gritty,
rough. China, a memory refracted
through tropics: small fat god, white beard,
riding a deer. A Chinese Santa Claus.
In his hand, the fruit of which we speak:
everything peachy.

3: IN AUTUMN I TAKE UP MY KNIFE

The view from the kitchen sink takes in the garden,
the fence, the tall trees in the valley, the children shouting
and crying, the feijoa tree, shedding its fruit,
like large green tears, or bullets big as a human heart.

Each swipe of the dish-sponge is anger or regret,
choices have consequences, consequences constrict
to the tightness of skin on a fruit, this feijoa
I slice into, savagely, and stop. Pineapple-scented.

The soft, fragrant jelly within.

4: PRAYER IN MID WINTER

Just over the fence, the neighbour's mandarin
lifts dark green branches to a low grey sky.
Fruit in the topmost branches, held like an offering.
What can I offer? Only a heart that is broken,
broken as this mandarin: ripped peel and segments
spread out on the palm, each minute sac of juice
curved in supplication: *Forgive me*.
Rain breaks from the clouds in thundering absolution.

The whole house echoes. Half-afraid and laughing,
the children run in and throw themselves at my legs.

MICHAEL BRENNAN

b. 1973

Michael Brennan was born in Sydney in 1973. He graduated from the University of Sydney and completed a PhD (on the poetry of Robert Adamson) in 2001. His first poetry collection, *The Imageless World* (2003) won the Mary Gilmore Award in 2004 and was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Award. He also received the Marten Bequest travelling scholarship for Poetry in 2004, spent time in Berlin and, thanks to the help of a Nancy Keesing Studio residency from the Australia Council for the Arts, at the Cité Internationale des Arts. His second collection of poems, *Unanimous Night*, was published in 2008, winning the William Baylebridge Memorial Prize and being shortlisted for the NSW Premier's award.

Brennan has taught in the fields of English literature and cultural studies at universities in Australia and Japan. He currently lives in Tokyo, where he is an associate professor in the Faculty of Policy Studies, Chuo University. Besides poetry he has written literary criticism, and was co-editor (with Peter Minter) of the anthology *Calyx: 30 Contemporary Australian Poets* (2000), and editor of a posthumous selection of Noel Rowe's poetry, *A Cool and Shaded Heart* (2008). He is the Australian editor of the online, Netherlands-based poetry journal, *Poetry International Web*, and director of the independent publisher Vagabond Press.

Letter Home

“Ah, good. I was not very sure, finally, of having initiated the conversation myself.”—“But could I have come otherwise?”—“Friendship would have sent you.” He reflects again: “I wrote to you didn't I?”

MAURICE BLANCHOT

These are strange lands I barely understand.
We are walking in a park of manicured lawns.

The sky is a mosaic of syllables
Parts of a puzzle.

The people here douse themselves in petrol
As though poetry mattered.

Some of the pieces are missing
And the old man tells me we have to make new some new ones.

He looks through me. It matters little if I am here.
In a corner of the park monks are burying elephants.

I found a word under my tongue
but swallowed it whole.

The lawn is a lesson in geometry, it imitates
The cast of the concrete walls.

I don't know if the grass is grey or the concrete grass.
None of it looks like the sky, least of all the sky.

Fashioned out of water, paths no one walks on
Lead into proximity.

The old man spits out tones that sit in pools on the water,
Half-oil, half-mercury, he tests them with one foot.

In the distance someone or something catches fire.
Perhaps it is the elephants coming into bloom.

On a street in Tenerife she finds a photo
A pigtailed girl she places on her index finger's

Soft pad and balances there each day of her life.
At night she listens to jazz in Stockwell

Where she gets in for free

While outside estate kids hustle for crack

Or she dreams carefully of lavas turned to basalt.
And a boy half-covered by dune sands.

As some morning she could discover certainty
Between the sketches of her notebook:

The woman with the oversized eye, the thin bodies
And small breasts hidden between phone numbers.

She doesn't walk the quickest way home
After the jazz, through the unkempt cemetery,

Where male lovers meet at night to touch
That place between desire and fear, where

She's seen a fig's roots melt over a grave
And clutch a headstone in its liquid grip,

1856 in one hand, today in the other.
She doesn't know the girl with the pigtails

Is already nineteen and works as a temp in the City,
How she laughs with friends and falls in love easily.

On the Hawkesbury, it's nearly 5am,
Prawns ghosting up from the million year thick silt.

You ask if people sense the tide more
Or less here in London.

Your computer holds onto daylight saving,
An Augustine close to the mechanism.

You discount time as a question,
Shuffling about the house, a poem,

Looking for one final kill before daybreak.
I get your email in a room that is another

Version of hell. Row after row of bodies
At terminals, reflections erased in digital mirrors.

A room made of words that never touch paper,
Of people looking nowhere.

I think of Mallarmé's book,
The prose, *Le Tiroir de laque*,

Then of Kay in Marrickville
Covering his body in Japanese tattoos,

Already older, ink blurred at the edges.
Are aesthetics enough? Dedication?

Only a word apart, *friendship* and *survival*,
We learn to face death.

On the way home, I walk through the Underground
Finding comfort in the tide of people.

Charing Cross to Euston to Angel,
Re-reading the poem, I listen for the prawn birds,

The trawler's engine, for the word
That turns to experience.

(i.m. Peter Bohrsmann)

Could he write back now, and explain faith
Interrupted past and present, how it stole his life

And returned it as the lightest, meaningless thing?
I could write something about corridors in the house

Where I grew up, how the angle of shadow cut light
In a certain way, distinct even now

Though the house was demolished a decade ago,
Childhood scenes developed into townhouses.

Years climbing around storm-water drains
Might almost be a metaphor

But I can make nothing of his suicide, the steps he took
From the back to the front of the car, the solid sound

As the door closed, how the engine turned over cleanly,
And hummed in the dark.

Spring starts its slow strip-tease.
Each day people are wearing less,

thick woollen coats give way to cotton,
firmer lines of hips, buttocks and breasts.

I listen for the music you taught me,
one that settles slowly between each thing.

Those strange words—kindness, friendship,
care—stranger still spoken

in the language spoken here.
I sit sensing the tide of people,

sometimes testing it with a smile
or with the broken language

I'm learning, trust
kindness speaks anywhere.

I listen carefully to idioms of home
rising in another language

between friends huddled
in conversation, the gentle percussion

of a young couple sheltering
from late winter air.

I run my finger along words
as if each word was a prayer.

I understand so very little,
practicing my phrases I swap

each 'I' for another, later folding them
in silence, I settle it there.

Ah the seasons, the fine houses,
no one's blameless, right?
Belgian ales and love hotels, I hunkered
down to designs of happiness
the gutless couldn't dodge.
How it aches, this happiness,
every time the cock sings.
I no longer give a fuck
it dictates my life to me.
That snare hooked me body and soul
and scattered all my troubles.
What can be made from my meandering?
Chance words rising up and stealing away.
How time passes far from home!

We heft the bags
one by one
onto the wharf
in the early hours,
the outboard mixing
with first curlews,
oil with water.
We pile them four at a time
on the old trolley, wheeling them
along a drunken line,
to the end of the wharf
where we stack them
in a long low pyramid.
As the tide draws away,
we lay down formwork,
scraps of timber, metal
and brick. We set
concrete squares
scrounged from a worksite,
amongst the debris,
the broken alluvia of
beer bottles and oyster shells
smoothed out and level.
We mix the concrete
in a barrow borrowed
from our neighbour,
the sculptor with
the beautiful wife,
blue metal grating
against the shovel's edge.
We stamp and smooth
the surface, pressing gravel
below the wet grey plane,
making two parallel paths
that lead into the river
as the light draws to its peak
and eases again,
the tide rising with
the coming night,
concealing our work,
leaving nothing behind.

My mother
digging into
earth, planting
lemon trees
in the middle

of suburbia,
laying out
lucerne, mulch
and fertiliser.
My brother and I
pissing on them
each afternoon
to help them grow.
All of this already
years ago.

My father trawls up a fireman's hat
brings it to the house
where he washes it in
a metal pail of rare rainwater.
Every five years the escarpment
across the river catches
and every ten or so,
they worry it'll jump black water.
My father tells me that morning
he found the old hat
amongst driftwood and oyster shells.
He points with a chuckle
to one or two places
where a mollusc has attached itself,
before he goes back inside,
leaving the hat to dry in the sun,
light playing once again
on its fire-licked surface.

She's taking these deep gulps from a take-away coffee cup,
sitting on the little tiled wall, looking around.

Behind her a man plays with his son, hoists the child
onto a shoulder, a sack of kicking potatoes.

The woman with the coffee is watching, a bit excited
and happy, so happy, like the child

squirming with it, happiness in a strong grip.
Near them, it must be the wife, a woman is rubbing her

overfull belly, pregnant again. You can feel the warmth and
fullness of it all around, filling the air.

The woman on the wall is smiling and jittering and watching
the child and the man as they walk to the wife.

The boy watches the world, laughing, almost upside down.
Even the father is smiling now. The girl is waving to the boy

and the man waves back, showing the boy it's ok, she's ok,
so the boy enthusiastically starts up too.

The little family walk away waving to the woman
who keeps taking those long draughts of coffee

and waving and smiling and looking around for whoever it is
that's about to arrive, whoever it is she's been waiting for.

November already.
Warmer months finding form.

trays of bulbs laid out, tulips, crocus,
lilies, fat and golden offerings

brushed clean of black northern earth,
names bright and strange as prayer:

Delft Blue, Jeanne d'Arc, Remembrance,
names, the ordinary mysteries,

Mrs John T. Scheepers, Groenland,
Black Parrot, Doorman's Record,

each waiting for weathered hands
to give them back to blind earth,

to bury them
in patient unknowing,

and wait
until winter's end.

Forty months
of darkness

stumbling
from one body

to the next
with nothing

to show

but memory

her beautiful face
rising far above

the dark
we share

saying there
is no god

here
between

us
only

me and
you.

When I get back
after three weeks
travelling
the same full moon
that hung over
the harbour
where we sat
now hangs over this city.
Here it is fat and orange,
and no one celebrates its
passing, caught
above a skyline
that seems
so suddenly
so foreign
and unfamiliar.

I should tell you, it's nothing like home.
Not one of them thinks of me as a stranger.

They welcome me to their houses with rough
hands and feed me delicious feasts.

After each meal, they stroke my eyebrows
and beard, and dry the tears

that have run down my cheeks over months

travelling from town to town.

They tell me they are strangers here,
hanging their word for such things

in the cool night air, between the beard-stroking
and the young eyes of the oldest among them.

They say soon they will leave me,
but I am to keep feasting in their absence,

that someone will come and I must invite him in,
I must not say too much, but feed him and afterwards

dry his tears. Before I leave, I must tell him
this is his home now, that he is no stranger here.

They say, none of this is strange.
They say, they will wait for me in the next town

with their gentle hands and playful eyes,
that the train will take me there, and on the way

I can listen to the old man's crying
and let the lightness of night find my face,

I can remember the feasts from home,
and wait for silence to have its fill.

They tell me, when we meet in the next town,
they will explain it all.

I'd walked for months, perhaps years,
I'd been expecting a fork in the road
but nothing like it appeared.

It wasn't clear to me if it was time
or us running headlong to the end.

By midday, life seeming long,
I stretched out on melting asphalt,
peppered by the shade of a plane tree,
the full light of day splintering
into something bearable, a coolness
reminding me of evening, of the end,
a day, a month, some years up ahead
where all this would make sense.

I dozed off there, bits of gravel
biting into my back lying by the road,
morning's sweat drying, cool on skin,
muscle ache almost summery now,

reminding me of the roads behind,
twists and turns, the backtracking
and blind faith that got me here,
wherever here is, never sure
what's ahead, getting by
on a few beautiful things set aside,
faces moving along different roads
sheltered under the same sky, a sky
I can't see clearly from here, but here,
half asleep in the cool air, hope creeps in,
its shadowy geometry falls on me
careless in the sun, showing the way
a path winds away to wind back again,
the heat sharp in the middle of nowhere,
empty and comforting as the road ahead.

There you are already juddering along
on your two year old legs after Leon or Ned,
while Matthew watches over his kid blond
sister. Already you're getting into scrapes,
wild with the short time here,
the abundance of it all bursting. What is it
that you brought along with you from
some other world, some stronger, gentler
light? The simple blessing of our names
learnt and spoken, your first words
making this world new all over
with each sound, each syllable totally strange
and exciting, some mysterious bit of trouble
and fun you're leaning into or falling towards,
your balance still unsteady, then there you are,
off again, headlong and giggling.

You are close,
breath drawing
fast amongst
eight hundred
year old cedars,
stones
weathered bare
by living things,
specks of sand
and rock,
carried
on the breeze,
insignificance
shaping everything,

here where a poet
noted
nothing
more
than a season
passing,
autumn air
warmed
on breath
and so
we continue
our slow ascent
one thousand
four hundred
and fifty steps
of stone hewn
from this
mountain
rising
naming
the temple
where we sit
the view
the valley
appearing now
russet leaves
given
to a sharp cold fire
the deep green
of ancient trees
holding still,
the ancient breeze
running fast now
smooth and invisible
across stones,
smooth across
the surfaces
of our eyes,
invisible
flecks
endlessly
erasing
each
thing.

I find him
by the path,
his stone shoulders
overgrown

with moss
and lichen,
his smiling face
erased completely
by centuries of
rain and wind.
I sit beside him
for the barest
moment, feet
heavy and close
to the earth, ground,
the day's heat cooled
and gathering, our bodies
whole again and unfamiliar,
returned from
the infinitesimal
fragments
we share.

Postcard

The old man fumbles with his keys,
The waiter appears embarrassed.

'I don't want to talk about love any more,
But sing it on the pebble of your tongue.'

She listens, counts petals of a sunflower
on the table between them, and listens.

'I want to sing so the stone rests, knows
Nothing of the world but that love creates us

From a moment, that the world only exists
The fraction before it sings.'

She listens and counts petals just so many
grains of sunlight trapped.

At the mango stall by the roadside
there's a free white hat with every purchase.

A man there offers you an opinion
of the lychee's relation to the ramekin.

With an easy assurance he will give you
the etymology of experience,

revealing a bruise on the skin,
sweet golden flesh below.

He will offer you a cheeky ten-gallon hat
and a circumspect commentary:

'The skin of our lips and of the mango
form for the juices—of the mouth, the fruit

and those mingling on the chin—a penumbra.
Like the mango, we too conceal a stone.'

If we went back to school
everything might seem small.

We could begin again. Pick it up.

Start over. Scribble initials

in a chalky love-heart
on melting asphalt

or something concrete.
Instead we are in this room.

Air-conditioned
and well-fed.

I'd forgotten about the walls
you leant against all summer long,

what it feels like
to be lifted from water.

I sold my predicate in town
to pay the fare out here.

There was no typography to think of,
the press gets cold all on its own.

These verbs feel like anachronisms,
fat heads of wooden mallets bashing.

The fork's tines are still bent.
My table-manners are appalling.

Patting the mangy dog's black hair,
the goatherd's wife suggests,

'Perhaps the vernacular is a drunk
Drowning in the ocean.'

We're happy here, the months are long.
I was going to work on my tan

but the sun sets at five
and won't be up again before April.

Youth

We speak
of a good death
knowing it

approaches
each moment:
a blind lover,

a darkening
caress.
A desire

Only, not
our living
warmth.

You hold
time on
the surface

of your eyes
searching
the body's

patterns
for certainty,
for the dark

that rushes in.

Decoding

We are
slow tides
spread
into ground

our various forms
a formlessness
a slowness
at the edge

awaking to
unanimous
night
now felt

in the body's
slow
corruption
set out

into earth
from earth
to air
to feed fire

or bind again
as water, change
and transformation
all we are

before binaries
light and dark
life and death
lend us comfort.

Forgive hope,
forget your name,
keep only
this,

a love
not our own
but of what
we are part.

Pop Currency

Tokens of change crowd you over,
a deeper dark set in the dark, the blue,
a gentian in foreign plots, a coin gutted
and thread around the rear-view mirror,
snapshots curved on the edge of a glass.

A conical shell in subsections, a watercolor,
a study for this stairway into America.
One day step outside, just start to walk,
face pixilated, looped over bites of sound
and copy. Take bread and regret. Gasoline

burns identify one refugee but kill the other.
Morocco, intransigent New York, in the delta
of coffee grounds, hashish tar, our very own
avalanche. Remind me, oh Exotica—in Anéfis,
Mali, Africa—of the shoes of the first world.

Driving to the coast, road-train rhetoric crying
'O Pacific! O Pilgrims! O Hammer!' O fuck it,
I know what I want to know is a pop-song,
all vinyl interiors and a libidinal ease. Just
make the rent and spare a little change.

Earth or Sky

She was talking about a field,
a field empty with the sky.
We had seen it a thousand times,
never the same.

She said she would go there
and lie under the blue sky
and sink into the ground
while looking at the sky.

She said it was like sinking
into the sky when she did it.
She felt the sky hold her close,
ease in through each of her pores.

It was much later then,
the happiness never left me,
her words coming back
warm upon my face.

The Imageless World

When we walk
into the world will I
look through your eyes

and see clouds
of lightest unknowing,
patterns they roll as

—in, out and through—
a handful of stories
we cast, skimming

across motionless water,
rains gentle with heat,
the years with a need

to love something
stronger than ourselves.
Are we breaking threads

joining us to myths
of day, such as love,
strength, world,

enclosing freedom
in tokens, the rising
saturation between

leaf and bark, as world
suspends without us,
without our knowing.

We are travelling
again, as distance
and its hungers,

you & I, a day,
a night, unbinding
each other so that

we uncover silence
beyond words, selves
beyond silence

separate us now
We are differences &
nothing more

Radiance slips from us,
there is nothing
inside our words

contained in this
groundless world
and its struggle

of limits and beginnings.
I repeat you. You me
& there, now, we exist,

a script of crows' feet
tiring our eyes, charting
joy across skin.

Our modern loves
are survivors,
late night television.

seventies heroes
& hip-hop clips,
sound bursting

through hammers
of our ears. What
to praise but

endurance, the
interminable gulf
between.

There is no pain.
Night dissolves
into white noise,

the blind remote,
trudging
through snow,

day broken
turning again in
finite lives,

that meaningful
word that no
longer exists.

The image
shaped

by absence,

perhaps it
will sing,
a glorious bird

described,
fattened on
honeyed words.

Dead
on the roadside,
wings

suggest flight,
nothing of sorrow.
We are caught

on mild currents
of recollection
that lift us higher,

as though world
was residue, not
imperceptible

loss,
a moment
that draws away

There is nothing,
here, a century,
habit forming

forgetfulness.
Time between
moment &

word, space
where an image
might form.

A rain of ash,
curve of a rib,
the Vistula,

a sea of hair, perspex,
a warehouse
of cases, chalked

name, age, date.

A single blond
braid cut close

to the scalp.
Walls of faces, dead
bracketed by dates.

What do I know, not
knowing how to forget,
how to begin to remember.

The Earth Here

It opened under my eyes,
the earth there, where I
dug and planted, where
this world bloomed.

I buried him thoroughly,
far away, into years, into
silence that moved
between unknowing.

Knowledge began then,
this endless falling silence.
Still it took hold,
grew under my eyes,

formed in my skull
through the tracery
of veins, laid roots
of heart and tongue,

so that this body
might be new,
moving in the world,
drawn against light.

Rebirth

Yet another morning and I get a sense
the world has been given a second chance,
the first touch of warmth rising white
and fine from the hollows of night.

Breathe a sigh of relief, ponder the nebulous
ways that brought you to this rebirth
of circumstances beyond your control,
how you became movement and rest

between particular things, such as the residual coffee
on your mug's rim, not unlike scurf still clinging
shore, or layers of ancient weather systems drawn
up from some arctic ice shelf, and the miracle

that all of this has something to say to you
particularly, you there, in your freshly laundered
underwear rubbing sleep from your eyes,
so happily befuddled to find we are all far from

alone, setting forth here, trundling about
the spaceship Earth, unsure of our destination.
Go out now, time-traveller, read your future,
on the rings of some ancient tree and consider

your prophecies carefully, between collecting
your dry cleaning and the morning papers,
between the cosmic small talk and chit-chat
the world and you are revolving elliptically around,

shifting into hints and premonitions of some
grander pattern, that you might see much later,
rising unscientifically, say, in the look of surprise
that surfaces on her face in a smile anciently encoded

in your DNA when love first fell through you,
a look that to the curious and persistent might remind
each speck of us of the stardust from which we are
constantly and mindlessly evolving.

Monologue in the Dream

I walk down the narrow,
tiled hall,
where the lights
flicker and black out.

You are in the last room,
a torso on the ground,
barely that but for
the snake of a spine,

vertebrae lying below
grey hessian flesh.
There is no movement
but for the lights

in the flickering dark
and the idea of you
I carried just this far
for so long, an idea

which can no longer
walk the way back, or take
my hand or see for itself
we must change our lives.

Unanimous Night

Night closes over
the earth our bodies become.

We are other worlds now
than the ones we were raised in.

Our children washed
clean by the sun grow

into the absence of sky,
imagined in these best of worlds

whispered into being.
There is endless nowhere,

there is nobody to pray to
so pray and wait for nobody.

No salvation will come
only peace, a gathering

of words between us, strangers
showing each other a way.

When we arrive nowhere,
and face nobody but ourselves,

your eyes open again, and I see
my face hidden in yours.

Our languages, our hands
enclose each other

breath no longer holding
syllables but

descent of warmth
from late afternoon skies

heavy and humid
to the lightness of tongues

wrestling each other,
descending in lines

mouth, neck, breast,
belly, hip, thigh,

our bodies' tide
connecting earth and sky

one afternoon set adrift
a future

breaking late evening
into storm, cooler air

renewing lightness
opening within us.

Your mouth flowers.
I pass hours on the lip

of each word,
your eyes describe

imageless worlds.
If I wait here

in the dark
what will arrive,

what day will set upon us,
one where our bodies

stretch against each other
no longer a horizon

but home, humming
like this city?

Your fingers curve around me.
Your touch is a question.

When my tongue seeks out
the hollow below your tongue

I taste words I've waited
a lifetime to answer.

Come, come,
I am building a house

out of syllables
to hide the night

where your face appears
between sky and ground.

Stealing sleep, come,
little pickpocket love,

come, with your keys,
your switchblade and misery.

Will you unlock doors,
cut through these paper walls

or steal quietly away
to another night?

Come, sight, take my eyes.
Come, touch, take my skin.

Here are the broken locks.
Come, steal to this house.

Come and dwell here
without walls.

On the pads
of you fingertips

you hold a name
a circular path

I lie in your arms
a name inside

a name
our lives gather

where we dwell
in movement

skin folded in skin
touch folded in touch

our bodies a path
toward each other

dwelling between
you and I

you and I touch
a life inside a life

our bodies' gentle
being inside being.

How long can this last
day exhausts night

so we lie
together

sharing light
freedom

trapped in eyefuls
thick with salt?

How long will freedom
give a horizon

to our selves
given to flight?

How long will freedom
give this limit

where we welcome
each empty room

each breath we give
where sky becomes

ground and we fall
groundless together?

And call it beauty
in what language,

yours, mine, one
our bodies share?

So happy to be
now

in your presence
lips, tongue, cock

seeking out my
absence in you.

What will you find?
A sky turned inward?

A ground leaping up?
The taste of words?

A horizon
inside the world?

I offer a question
where we can rest

awhile, dwell,
here, without answer.

All this world
whispering in ash.

We conceal time
in each other,

draw timelessness
into this self we share

through the passages
of the body

the silky hollows
of each curve

uncovering
namelessness

concealing our eyes
bodies raining down

forgetting world.
We build again gently

raising breath and pulse
into a city, into a room,

welcoming slowness,
a name's few syllables.

My eyes rusted dry,
look like ash.

The sun has not set
in them for days.

I walk in
built from debris.

I dress
in stolen junk.

I carry peace
through the night

of your name.
I place it

between the leaves
of your voice.

When I reached you
the night was a lie

explaining its warmth
in broken syllables.

When I reached you
my hands were blind.

Nothing grows here
with this heat.

The earth trembles
every few months

shuddering through
its colossal sleep.

I pass days
walking about the city

finding words
mocking the silence

we speak
together

passing between
words, strangers.

I spend an hour
peeling the telephone

until I taste
the flesh of your voice

whispering
in the mouth of my ear.

Our house shakes
empty.

The sleeping earth
holds us

in its open palm
shakes us awake.

It could all end
in an instant

with nothing lost.
Strangers and lovers

faces stuffed in our pockets
each instant ending

in the simple passion
for the next.

Years from now
will the same end rule.

The earth's troubled balance
still threatening

the always arriving
the never present?

When these words
reach you

what will
they remember?

Each letter
curves

into the next
a series of limbs

each of us
each word

existing alone
curved toward

the next rising
the last

knowing
nothing, nobody

exist in us
uncover us

nameless
inside the named.

There is no flight
from this sleep

this city on the edge
of disaster.

When the ground
trembles again

beneath our feet
I hear you call

in the night
waking

to find the city
broken into its parts.

Overpasses, highways
fallen in a frown

across the city's face
flowering in strangers.

I hear the sirens and light
the streaming inside

I hear your voice
open in a foundation.

There is safety
on the wide streets

empty spaces
halving disaster

drawing the city
in two

never to be sure
which half

is destroyed.
We stand in the middle

of the broadest.
longest street.

Even the buildings
are distances.

The city quiet.
The earth at rest.

We see neither side
or end of the road

only each other
endless space between.

I take your hand
and kiss the palm

that kisses my face
each fits the other

a sound to its letter.
I walk into a valley

and find the river
of your voice.

I see you, the shadow
of light reflected off water.

What do we make
of each other?

Am I the silence
between each letter

or the sound between
each silence?

Are you the light
between the shadow

or the shadow
among the light?

I can see the sun
stretch for miles

in strangers' faces.
I cut across

the language
of their eyes.

Their tears are
long syllables

gathering
the sun.

Eyes
syllables

I break them open
and find night again.

When I break
night open

I find our names
breathing slowly

staring out the window
of each other.

I erase your eyes
My sleep in the sea

I bury your words
in new bodies

dancing between
the newness of our names

I strip myself of song
I find you naked

I close the door of my name
I give in to praise

I shout the silence of your touch
I give in to love

I lock myself in the key
I give in to nothing

I walk the precipice
of your words

I steal handfuls from the tide
I stuff them in my mouth

I give in to vicious hope
I drown in the sky of your voice.

I lie down
with strangers

I share my name
I live for moments

under borrowed skies
I give them back

in blue handfuls
my tongue

hammers together
I wrap them

in the history
of your touch

written on my skin
I empty the cities

of my lungs
my heart shrinks

to its shores
I wait for your absence

to creep inside me
and steal the warmth.

The rain recollects
ocean and sky

dreams of earth
and ash tumbling

against each other,
a balance.

You tread along alleys
in a thousand faces.

Autumn rain drums
impatient fingers

on the black street.
One face comforts night,

in her hands the moon
blinks through each month.

One whispers to the rain
balancing and weighing

what is given, what is stolen,
what is made, what is broken.

Another holds summer
on a leash, barking at night.

The walls that held us
separate

The room we inhabited
dwells inside itself

A seed awaiting sunlight
A name lost

On the tip of my tongue
our kisses fall on their knees

I embrace your absence
I love nothing we become

I search for the face
that does not conceal yours

I peel your touch
from my skin

I follow the river
of your voice

I watch it disappear
to the ocean

I take your name far within
and sing its endless praise.

MARIA TAKOLANDER

b. 1973

Maria Takolander, born in Melbourne in 1973, is an Australian writer. She is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

Takolander is the author of four books: a work of fiction, *The Double* (Text, 2013); a book of literary criticism, *Catching Butterflies: Bringing Magical Realism to Ground* (Peter Lang, 2007); and two collections of poems, *Ghostly Subjects* (Salt, 2009) and *The End of the World* (Giramondo, forthcoming). Takolander won the inaugural 2010 *Australian Book Review* short story competition, and she was awarded a 2011 Australia Council New Work grant to complete a subsequent book of short stories, *The Double*. *Ghostly Subjects* was short-listed for a 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Prize. Takolander's short stories, poems and essays have been widely published in Australian journals and newspapers. Her poems have also been featured in *The Best Australian Poems 2005* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poetry 2006* (UQP), *The Best Australian Poems 2007* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poems 2008* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poems 2009* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poetry 2009* (UQP), *The Best Australian Poems 2010* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poems 2011* (Black Inc), *The Best Australian Poems 2012* (Black Inc) and *The Best Australian Poems 2013*. Her poetry is also included in the 2011 anthology *Thirty Australian Poets* (UQP).

Geography Lessons

How a mountain can forsake you for the sky,
casting away your heart
like a goat kicking at a brittle stone.

How a forest can feed you with its air,
tenuous fusion of night and day,
until you think it might be enough.

How a river can feel small and dangerous,
calling you by your secret name,
the one only your mirror knows.

How an ocean can rage at the moon
until you adopt its colossal anger as your own
and live believing it is all something personal.

Chimney

By day it does its thick and heinous work,
only slowly,

clogged with the sweat
of coal, meat, sticks and wood.

It is like a character from folklore
—or something older—transmogrified

into this domestic hunkering
of brick and soot.

*

In the evening it partakes, ominously,
of the sky's transfiguration into night.

When the men and women have come and gone,
like loaves of bread,

and the darkness solidifies and the children dream,
the cold of the planets begins to seep in.

Before dawn, with the embers quiet,
the chimney opens itself to the stars' dying light.

Winter War

At dawn the birch trees are ice-smacked:
shocked and glassy.

The man limps across the snow, like a toad,
his only illness memory.

Light presses against his eyes,
like a shard of the bottle

he broke over the night
— though it was the evening,

softer than skin, that had tempted him
from hiding.

He recalls the suckling: iron-bitter
as the earth, yet river-silken.

Then the black sky: pricked with stars
like a medieval device and cold as iron.

How the birch trees, pale as naked men,
were flayed against them.

KARLO MILA

b. 1974

Karlo Mila (b. 1974) is a poet. Born in Rotorua, Mila is of Tongan, Palagi and Samoan descent. She was educated at Massey University and has worked as a trade union organiser, teacher and health research manager.

Mila says she has been writing poetry since standard three. Her work has been described as "poetry [that] speaks to the soul". Her creative-style includes many references to her cultural roots including the broader Pacific, political issues, and love. She is also interested in the idea of literary whakapapa (genealogy), dedicating entire sections to it - "Chanting Back To The Bones" and "Tuakana" - in *Dream Fish Floating*. Currently, she is completing her PhD in Sociology at Massey University, after being based in Auckland for 10 years.

Her first collection of poetry, *Dream Fish Floating* (Huia, 2005), won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry at the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Awards. Mila says that her poetry is both personal and political, reflecting 'issues of the Pacific diaspora and navigating the tensions between traditional cultures and urban Aotearoa-Pacific realities.'

Writing about *Dream Fish Floating* in their report for the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Awards, the judges said that: 'Karlo Mila writes with flair, energy and passion, creating a direct, accessible poetry. This multi-cultural, lyrical voice is one the judges expect to hear a lot more of.'

Mila has had work anthologised in *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (Auckland University Press, 2003), and *Short Fuse: The Global Anthology of New Fusion Poetry* (Rattapallax Press, 2002). She has had poems selected for Best New Zealand Poems in 2003, 2005 and 2006.

She has recently published *A Well Written Body* (Huia, 2008), in collaboration with German-born artist Delicia Sampero. This publication is a 'multidimensional conversation of images and imaginings between two women, crossing art forms and cultures' (Huia press release).

Pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava

The same wish
slipped into each disc
of my back

I hoped you'd bring balance
like an outrigger
we would move
double hulled
through life

you would keep me sure and swift
on a surface of glistening water
water melting into water
melody running into blue
bye sinking deep into ocean

I dreamed of balance on such a surface
I dreamed of the feeling of floating

the same wish
slipped into each disc
of my back

now I'm stretching

falling through open arms
melting into fluid
into foam
lungs flooded with fear

if i pulled each wish
from my back
one by one
maybe
I might
float buoyant
on the strength of my own spine

Tane Mahuta

Tāne Mahuta is a giant kauri tree (Agathis australis) in the Waipoua Forest of Northland Region, New Zealand. Its age is unknown but is estimated to be between 1,250 and 2,500 years. It is the largest kauri known to stand today. Its Maori name means "Lord of the Forest", from the name of a god in the Maori pantheon.

Tane Mahuta
holding up the sky
weathering storms
absorbing lightning
holding tears in your leaves
cupped gentle in your fingertips

Tane Mahuta
I see your face
unblinking in the sun
I see you blow kisses at the stars
you look into the eye of the moon
and smile back at her when tears threaten

Tane Mahuta
a forest will gather gentle around you
I want to wrap my arms around your limbs
feel your heart beat against my chest
I will strip away the dead leaves
I will carry your seeds in my pockets

Tane Mahuta
I want to help lift your heavy heart
from your foundations
to the uttermost tips of your twigs
I will sing with the birds
resting in your elbows
I will war their feathers
in my hair

Tane Mahuta
evergreen to me
I will hide in the hollow of your heart
and sing the sacred song
to your spirit
I will tickle your toes
and the whole forest will quake
with your laughter

Death of a DJ

the needle you used
to mend the tears beneath the fabric
that for so long
successfully hemmed in the unravelling fears
did its fair share of unpicking
because there isn't a flicker of recognition
in your colourless eyes
when you turn up at my door
you've just got power to sell and pamphlets
to pass on, I check your nametag
which confirms you are you
skin the colour of concrete holding water
crushed eggshell of a boy I once knew
who wore black pepper bowler hats
with salt white hair
and DJed till dawn
the coolest cat in town
now on the edge of your ninth life

I heard your hypodermic sewing circle disbanded
that you can't show your face in Wellington
leaving a string of bad debts and worse judgement calls
behind you
as you pass me the power prices
I grind my teeth in anger
at the false intimacy a name badge allows
as you are reduced to a shaky
biro blue rendition
of your former phat black vivid tagged self
and I want to say

I'm not the billpayer
but I want to buy what you're selling
and I want to say
I'm not a Christian
but the prodigal son was probably an addict
and God be with you
but instead
I just think about how a shooting star
is the same thing as a falling star
and he's disappeared down our driveway
going door to door
selling what's left of his power

Octopus Auckland: 8 Suburbs

1.

in mission bay
the beaches
shakes the imported grains
off their backs
and sigh with the tide
that creeps up to the shops
wet with rain
hoping to snatch
somer recycled treasure from the shoreline
like a shoplifter

2.

in ponsonby
a smeared oil rainbow licks the gutter
glittering fat
reflecting colour
the rain-swell from last night
froths like a latte
through the grated bars of the drain
the flat white crowd
sips long blacks for breakfast
four and forty
four wheel drives
tread lightly
on city slicker streets

3.

in mangere bridge
one bridge stands perfectly still
watching the other
social climbing with traffic
the old bridge
has 'gone fishing'
and tongan boys
prod stingrays
breathless
bloated and poached
on the concrete
with friendly eyes
they greet us in samoan
and the rocks rumble with sea

4.

in grey lynn
all is semi-detached
and sub-divided
old ice cream villas
sliced like cake
into bite sized flats
full of upwardly mobile ex-students
willing to settle for off-street parking
these old villas
must remember back thirty years
to the slap of jandals
and wooden floors
groaning under the weight of cross-legged choir practice
hallelujah
sounding the same
in any language

5.

in mangere
david tua's parents' house
grimaces and flexes muscle
like a castle in the legends
of dutiful samoan children
and the honour of their parents
it stands almost as big as the school next door
but is dwarfed
by the church
where the huge mirrored arching window
has been boarded over
since the first time i saw it
'just asking to be smashed'
my partner explains
he grew up down the road

6.

in onehunga
the monolith looms
on the hill
we all see
what is missing
as keenly
as what
is left behind
the slopes of cornwall park
rolling gentle and green
a central city country estate
shared by joggers and dog walkers
scaring sheep
avoiding bulls

7.

in hillsborough
there are two indian dairies
side by side
i buy lotto from one
and everything else from the other
from a man whose smile is so tender and wide
it can wallop my heart while buying the paper
he gives me last week's magazine for free
i wonder at what point
he made the choice
that brought him here
sitting behind chocolate bars
bordered by boxes of cigarettes
pornography above his head.

8.

in mt eden
is the doctor
i go to
she is beautiful and blonde
well dressed
with hairy legs
her herbal tea
fills the air with raspberries and camomile
last week she was sick
and the lady doctor who saw me instead
asked
in perfect earl grey english
where i came from
originally?

not auckland
i replied

auckland
you feke
you octopus of a city
wrapping your tentacles around me
clinging to my skin
sticking to my surfaces
leaving welts and bites
of place and location
on my body

auckland
you feke
ever changing migrant colours

iridescent
trickster
of a city

For Ida (first Pacific woman judge)

Once I wrote

that we are the seeds of the migrant dream
the daughters supposed to fill the promise
hope heavy on our shoulders
we stand on the broken back of physical labour
knowing the new dawn has been raided.

But

we are the seeds of a much greater dream
that goes back across oceans of memory
a vision still held in the hands
of humble men buried in humble villages
who chant clear our paths
with every lost breath.

Ida, you have spoken of the sacrifice
of language lost, and the cost,
of success in the palangi world
and you have wrapped your own son safely
in fa'asamoa
he rests in a nest of language
learning to tame words
that flew like wild gulls
far beyond our understanding.

'This is the sacrifice of my generation'
you said
'but it will not be his,
this is where the sacrifice stops.'

The gull circles
and nest
and our sense of selves
rests.

You touch a vision
clasped to the breast
of humble women buried in humble villages
who still sing
across oceans of memory
in words that our children will be able to hear.

From Pink Katie to Blue Carrie (for Andrea)

You were always the Charlie's Angel
men should have married
they never seemed to know any better.

We were gingham girls
sewed tight-lipped together
escaping hand-me-down hardship
by living a paper thin paper doll existence
hooked on happy families
on rainy days.

I remember
how we wished for the elevated status
of cork filled high heels
on slave sandal budgets.

We practised being detectives
plastic hand-guns on our hips
you were my white-chick side-kick
my partner in solving crime
as I drama queened it through
my too-tanned over-olive skinned existence
tragically darker than Daisy Duke.

And when I needed to be a princess in pastel pink
or a bride in white
in someone's old petticoat
with mismatched elbow length gloves
and a shabby red rose at my throat
you would alternate between prince, frog, groom or
Remington Steele
just to keep the game going.

For Albert Wendt (On his Birthday)

you dare to fish
beyond the coral reefs
of our understanding

your net pulls in poems
flicking salty tales

you find nuanua
in the eye of hurricanes
celebrate thunder
we prefer not to hear
and relish
the quicksilver laughter
of lightning

you shake the tree
of the frangipani
and as the flowers fall from grace
you string them into sentences
ants and all

your narrative is a needle
that pierces the thickest skin
the ink of your pen
blending with our blood
tattooing stories of altered genealogies
between the lines
of our naked bodies

For John Pule

the poet told us
there was a beach
but a hurricane came
and swallowed it up

there was also a nation of people
but a New Zealand sponsored
hurricane
just as hungry
swept away people like grains of sand

with the help of
longremembered newfound family
he finds the old foundations
where hibiscus trees grow wild
with memories of his mother

using a new machete
he follows the old tracks
to a not-so-distant past
meeting his ancestors along the way
capturing them on canvas
mapping out their stories
so they will
never be lost

and his own children
will be able to find them

CLAIRE POTTER

b. 1975

“I describe my writing practice, and myself as a writer, as methodically itinerant – that is, my writing consists of structured periods of editing and researching interlaced with freer periods of writing and thinking. The way I think about my poetic writing involves three distinct, not unrelated approaches: academic, exploratory, poetic. Poetic is listed last because it is what arises after the excitement of the other two more energetic approaches has died down – poetry for me expresses the essence of what remains to be said.”

Claire Potter grew up in Perth, Western Australia. She moved to Sydney when she was twenty and completed an Honors degree in English Literature, before being awarded a French Embassy Scholarship to complete a Masters in Paris, on the setting/scene in psychoanalysis and tragedy. In 2006, Potter was awarded an Australian Young Poet Fellowship, from the Poet's Union and the Australian Council for the Arts. Her first chapbook, *In front of a comma*, was published and launched at the 2006 Sydney Poetry Festival. In 2007, her second chapbook of poetry, *N'ombre*, was published by Vagabond Press. Potter is currently reading a joint doctorate at the University of Western Australia and the Université de Paris VII, where she is writing about Thomas Hardy. Potter's first full-length poetry collection, *Swallow*, will be published by Five Islands Press in October 2010.

Not so much Bakhtinian as echoing Blanchot's conception of literature, Potter states that her poetry is “completely dialogic”, forming a conversation with the work of other poets, writers, artists and film-makers. Each book she writes follows an architecture aimed at creating a space in which this conversation might evolve. While her basic approach to poetry – shape over form, sound over lyric – often leaves her work less than ‘immediate’ in the way of Romantic or Modernist forms of lyricism, strains of European and Australian lyricism are apparent parts of the conversation she has entered into. She is in a line of Australian poets, running back through Kevin Hart and A.D. Hope, and resonant with Keats and Shelley, while creating a poetry itself perhaps more akin in tone to a layering of Antigone Kefala and Francis Webb, with Dickinson, Celan and Mallarmé. For that, perhaps her closest interlocutor in many ways is the remarkable contemporary American poet Andrew Zawacki, alongside whose work Potter's poetry can be in many ways favourably measured.

Potter is methodological in her approach to the writing of poetry, layering a range of interlocutors across the shape of the page, creating a polysemous work textured by its reading – academic, poetic, experiential and otherwise. While this is nothing unusual in itself in contemporary Australian poetry – think of poets as varied as John Tranter, L.K. Holt, or Michael Farrell – Potter's work is emerging as an interesting addition for her gifts in cross modulation and counterpoint, not least in terms of her conscious working and weaving of the symbolic and the semiotic that brings to mind Soller's “double causality” that Kristeva developed as “simultaneously ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the subject, divided in such a way that the subjective ‘unity’ in question is expended, expending, irreducible to knowledge, ‘bordered’ by laughter, eroticism, or what might be called the ‘sacred’”. With discussions recently heating up over the re-emergence of the lyric as a central form in Australian poetry, with especial emphasis placed on the perceived rise of a

generation of young female poets (baroquely dubbed by one critic as “The ladies of the lyric”), and the question Pam Brown raised whether this “re-emergence” is “a reaction against the innovations of postmodernism and the resultant north American, but globally influential, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry movement that had its heyday over 20 years ago”, Claire Potter’s work manages to fit into none of the hastily arising camps.

While commenting on the “new lyricism” in Australian poetry, Potter noted, “I don’t see myself as part of the young (female) lyricist movement supposedly emerging in current Australian poetry scenes. I was born in the seventies, a decade before this, and I read only a few young poets . . . My writing is not so immediate as the new-lyricist poets, but I have read only so little of their work, I am hardly qualified to comment. I find the word fashionably used, a lyrist to me is someone who has to be at least over 50. There is something grave about the term. Something Orphic rather than Sapphic.” More Sapphic than Orphic itself for its passions, playfulness and fragmentation, Potter’s work appears to take Kristeva’s revolution in poetic language, which inspired much of the innovative work of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school, as a starting point to a conversation in which, going on Potter’s definition of poetry and considerable work so far, much may yet remain to be said.

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Pandora's Window

Ornament of you hangs around my neck
in the shape of a smooth brown seed

you walk In the dark apple-eyed
along the ridges of my skin

its surface a bed of nails
you are forced onto tango-tip-toe

white conical lamps strung down Christmas hill
wreathe this meeting with nets of damaged pearl

fire flies flicker around the rims
of honey jars

in the heart of the house, a kettle boils — it sounds like rain
blossom

In Front of a Comma

*. . . over us a hand, an ocean heavy and cold, as if we
accompanied stones*

Seven hours earlier, beside a park bench
he slept standing

Now pendulous & out of his shell, drawing thin
blue lines & flowering water-blisters

through the pool behind him,
he wonders what it would be like

to speak with her again
but possibility as unlikely is a drawer for reddened eyes

where days spent
under the acacia tree, where
the missing xylophone keys he found in her car, where
an empty house, thick with imagination after a long absence

are stowed between
warped playing cards, plastic goggles & a coil of chipped,
yellow beads

.

Trembling, he pauses on the ropes to de-splinter
two sorts of daydream

one he can dispose of & the other
he is lacking

from the open window, a swallow half erased by the sun
swerves into his mouth

Bee Puppets

Suppa vagari, Lucretius, line 76

describes motion as beginning in the will of the mind

Glass, clear

As, as Ants raising baby wasps, unable to tell the difference
between ant larvae & wasp pupae

or Crystal, clear

As, as the dance-language of bees,

home from their morning flight, indicating the distance
& exact position of each flower

between the petals, white crab spiders, fronded as daisies
wait for bees —

taken, banded thorax goes limp
& cellophane wings tremble not slightly

fresh canticles of lavender still ringing on their tongues
three black *ochelli* turn inwards

(You will need: a yellow paper cup, black pipe cleaners, small circle
stickers, yellow felt, black vinyl tape, a large cardboard flower, a red marker,
scissors)

After being emptied & let fall
bees become puppets for travelling ant shows

Three Black Oranges

Snow tracks filled with nightfall, strange
how ice so quickly erodes
leather soles, flying foxes, imported oranges

Part of the frozen river; against the hull meaning
dips: Bukowski turns
to Oedipus
via Prokofiev & pens footnotes
to his father's reckless semen

writes how he wishes his I
had never been born, his trick that he'd
been stuck with

Three black oranges
cradled in park snow, flaccid as liver
croak with the muscularity of
an oboe when
I crush them with a stick

Spilling out of my pockets
envelopes distributed like dull frosted pea-
nuts – In the parking lot
I pass a bevy of disembowelled post boxes
drinking turps &
begging me
for the hiss of a letter

there only remains to say since writing
has become impossible:

hooked fish think of water
only as well as they can

your invisible calm
balances fruitfully a circle of dampening stones.

Poet's Note: The poem 'Three Black Oranges' was inspired by Charles Bukowski's poem 'Three Oranges' and Robert Adamson's book Black Water: Approaching Zukofsky. The poem is for Robert Adamson.

Flower of Industry

 lamplight faded as inkless tattoo
 burns inside the factory where you used to work— we cut a cigarette
between us & watch violets out of vases tilt sideways in thin shade

 above, one-eyed bird circles burning treetops— leaves split open
in the heat & throw mouthfuls of thistle downward

 a different bird, this time breasted in metal, pulls on a knot
of hot white bells & more fires

 are lit

 in the lucerne crop

.....

 above, your fingers (coppice of indifference
flick shrimp-tails into the pink yawns
of elastic old cats

I turn vases in the kiln & sweep dead blossom
with the shaving brush you found lying cold under the garage—
I get you a beer— you ash in my teacup— I drink from your ashtray

you give me a starfish

hand pulls shut the door, puts metal bird
back in the box & notices wings missing
 missing in what I suppose you would have called a sky-blue disaster

there's a flag over the table where you lie, a burnt flag
 flag nonetheless & dirty yellow petals adrift in my brain

above, silhouette breaks, contents wash in with veins of clay (I ask
you to hold me (as if slipping a paper weathervane

ALI ALIZADEH

b. 1976

*It's a quarter past
the fear of being terrorised
and forty-five minutes to
the sadism of being the aggressor*

Joanne Scicluna writes, 'These lines from Ali Alizadeh's recent collection of poetry evoke the struggle that is at the heart of this work: the struggle with the designation of 'otherness' – an otherness that is, in the words of the Russian writer Mikhail Bakhtin, only contingent, external, illusory. Alizadeh's poetry expresses a yearning for dissolution of category; a dismantling of the fictions of East and West.'

Ali Alizadeh was born in 1976 in Tehran, the capital of the then Kingdom of Iran, two years before the Iranian Revolution transformed the country into an Islamic Republic. He attended primary and 'guidance' school in his birthplace during the Iran–Iraq War and its immediate aftermath; and, having taken an early interest in books and literature, produced his first public writing – a simplified prose version of an episode of the early medieval epic *Shah-Nameh* (Book of Kings) – at 13, winning a young adults' literary award, and becoming the subject of a documentary film for Iran's national television.

Only months after, Ali's world capsized as his family immigrated from the oppressive, war-torn country; and his high school years in Queensland, Australia, marred by his classmates' racism, difficulties of adapting to a mostly hostile environment, and the tribulations of learning English, concluded with his enrolling in the Creative Arts Program at Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, in 1995.

Ali's experience as a Creative Writing student at Griffith was formative: influenced by new friends and popular 'grunge' music, he began writing 'performance poems' and reading them at pubs and student gatherings; then offered to do his Honours at the same university, he produced an experimental 'rhizomic' narrative poem titled *eliXir: a story in poetry*, his first book.

Ali then moved to Melbourne to study his PhD at Deakin University, completing his thesis, an exploration and redefinition of epic poetry titled *La Pucelle: the Epic of Joan of Arc*, in 2004; while publishing poems and other writings in local and national literary journals, and winning the *Verandah* magazine's 2000 Literary Award for the long poem 'Princess'. Among other works of this period were a poetry-film collaboration with director Bill Mousoulis, *A Sufi Valentine*; and the poem 'Rumi', first performed at La Mama Theatre, published in the literary journal *Going Down Swinging*, featured on ABC television's Sunday Arts program in 2007, and included in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* in 2008.

Ali has also had poetry, poetry translations and poetry reviews published in literary journals such as *Overland*, *HEAT*, *Southerly*, *Kalimat*, *The Warwick Review*, *Poetry Review*, *Wasafiri*, *Famous Reporter*, *Divan*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *turnrow*, *Red Weather*, *Voiceworks* and *Woorilla*; *The Age* newspaper; and anthologies such as *Over There: Poems from Singapore and Australia*, *Said the Rat!*, *The Best Australian Poems 2008*, *Contemporary Australian Poetry in Chinese Translation*, and *Culture Is . . . Australian Stories Across Cultures*.

Since being awarded his PhD in Professional Writing, Ali has published three more books: a collection of poems articulating perceptions shaped by violence, *Eyes in Times of War* (Salt Publishing, 2006); with Kenneth Avery, translations of mystical poems of a Sufi master, *Fifty Poems of Attar* (re.press, 2007); and the novel *The New Angel* (Transit Lounge Publishing, 2008), a tragic love story set during the Iran–Iraq War. Having decided to leave Australia in search of creative emancipation and inspiration, he lived in China for two years until 2007, then in Turkey for another year, before moving to Dubai where he currently lives with his wife Penelope and son Jasper, and teaches English composition, creative writing and literature. Ali is the reviews editor for the literary journal *Cordite Poetry Review*. His next book, a work of creative non-fiction based on his grandfather's life and the history of modern Iran, will be published in 2009.

Angelus Novus

After Walter Benjamin

The angry wind has shorn the feathers
off his wings.

He levitates on a fixed spot
by the highway. Is the wind

caused by the flood
of the speeding vehicles

or indeed hurled
by the rabid gods of heaven?

The angel can't tell. He watches
the atoms of his wings' debris

twirl in the tempest. Why
with such affection? A longing

for what? For the ruins
no doubt; for what's been crushed

by the onslaught of the divine
tragedy. Can he save any of it

from irretrievable erasure?
Will his suitcase have room

enough for the volume
of such immeasurable loss?

He can't tell
as yet. He floats, resists

being swallowed by the storm
and doesn't hitch a lift.

My People

Snared by nostalgia
reduced to an absolute past

o my people
how shall I save you?

Your faces reduced to eyes
that flicker from the dark

oppression of forgetting.
How shall my remembering

have the means to oppose
the sublime tyranny of time?

How my treasures
are buried with your being

beneath the rubble of memory.
Your name is a whimper

a history reduced to a sigh
beneath the mess of earthquakes,

revolutions and wars.
Your ancient tongue an elegy

at the funeral of belonging.
No, I can't save you

but place, once in a while
my freshest rose at the mausoleum

of your name, o my family.
And as the phases of my loneliness

wane towards a dark moon
I shall erect memorials

for the songs of your fading eyes
in the lands of annihilation.

Good Idea?

For Justin Clemens

Fin-de-Siècle France
much more congenial

to the glum exuberance
of your thoughts. Exile

in the land of mediocrity
and gum-trees, no doubt

unjust as Ovid's. Our Caesar
a banal bureaucrat who

jogs around a lake
in Canberra. "Intellectuals"

debate base quackery
in our desert island's

bored media. Nearly
buried by the sandstorm's

insignificance, I asked
for a good idea. My thesis

a pauper's grave,
withered formulae; since

the thirst for life
often kills. I was, frankly,

serious. You: "Then again
there are no good ideas"

and discoursed
with obstinate, burning

exactitude the belief
of doubt. Abelard lost

his balls for this. You
may be the last cynic

in the barren domain
of odious and senseless

pastoral optimism;
the strained and resilient

rope flung toward
my hands sinking in

the sand of the island's
so-called culture, or lack

thereof. Amen.

This Thing

For/with Penny

How to begin to define it
this momentous thing

between us? A monosyllable
rhyming with “dove”

and “above”, so dull
and dubiously religious

compared to the spirit
of our connection. Not that

talk of the numinous
wouldn’t apply. Your penchant

for the Tarot, mine
for the Sufis, altogether

I suspect more transcendental
than the babble

of necessity and hope
desired by our former selves. Now

I can’t say if “love” ever
belonged to my former lexicon

of merely being
with someone. A confession?

That wouldn’t become
my professed agnosticism; but

fate always the star
of your astrological ciphers

and my horoscope
no doubt a serendipity

in the house of your heart. Mine,
(forgive the war metaphors)

a fortress reigned by
the tyrant of solipsism until

your ram battered the gates
and your vanguard scaled

the ramparts. Now the untied
captives laze on the fields

of your victory. The tyrant
a cross between theologian

and troubadour, no longer a threat
to my peasants. But what

have you gained
from this conquest? Do I

make you happy? What do you call
this earth-shaking thing

between us? I suspect
your images altogether sharper

than my medievalist detours, say
animals—am I

salamander to your unicorn
or you a yellow crane

perched on my tortoise? Or
fairytale: you see

yourself as a compassionate
Little Red Riding Hood

to my repentant wolf? Not
very likely. I've never really

queried eating you; but
you must've glanced

the dangers of sharing life
with a confused and brooding

loner. A person of your insight
doesn't mess around

in Blue Beard's chamber.
And I'm frankly just

a diffused dragon. So do we
call this thing

domestication? What about
the euphoria of escaping

our house together
and boarding planes? Am I

your accomplice
or live cargo? Does it sound

like complaint? It's in fact
a celebration of the ecstatic

thing between us. I ask you
to comment. You say:

"It's a magical
ever-changing intertwining

of two lives on levels
mundane and divine."

Your Terrorist

You call me a barbarian.
I call you master.

You don't speak my language.
My words

noise in your ears; my poems
meaningless melodies.

Your poems
masterpieces of literature.

Your clothes
constitute fashion; your homes

architecture.
My house

the hovel your tanks levelled;
my clothes

rags. My beliefs
crushed by your technology

because I'm a barbarian.
But I must understand

your language. O master, your words
are essential to my survival. I have to

put your goggles on my eyes
to see myself,

a dangerous alien with
incomprehensible language

and innate savagery
because you're so civilised and meaningful.

You have the weapons
the tools for proving the logic

of your power. You wear clothes
that bolster your shoulders

and accentuate your height.
Me, I'm naked

and paraded as a prisoner
on your catwalks. I've been

defeated, dispossessed, and now
detained in the cages

of your metropolis. I can't remember
if I ever had my own culture

because your powerful voice
has deafened my memories. Your logic

proves I'm a primitive
at the mercy of your civilisation.

Yes, I understand
your language. I've been learning

the lexicon of my inferiority
from behind the bars. I now know

how to spell and pronounce
the terms of my slavery. Your shackles

are called Security; your war
Operation Freedom; your cluster bombs

food parcels for my children. O master,
I understand

what you want your filthy slave to be. I am
your barbarian, your terrorist;

your monster.

Immigration

I'll tell you why.
To survive

the onslaught of religion.
To outlive

the ghosts of martyrs.
To recover

from the world's longest war
since WWII. To live

beyond the hatreds
of patriotism. To see

the kinder face of humanity.
To think

free of the Faith's manacles.
To believe

without the obligation
of forming belief.

To discover
the basic joys of being.

The price? I'll tell you.
Evaporation.

Marginalised to the point
of disappearance.

Barred for nothing
more profound than a shade

of skin, a tone
of speech, a taste

of lifestyle. Alienated
beyond the word.

Ignored by the mighty.
Detested by the commoner.

Worth it? Doubtless.
To finally grasp

humanity's fraudulent truth.
To dream

the sweetness of equality.
To see past

the façade of brotherhood.
To be touched

you might say, by the rays
of a luminous discovery.

To abandon
all faith, and come to cherish

the immense solitude
of non-believing.

To desire. To know
the power of desire. To wait

joyfully amid unpalatable sadness.
Recommend it?

Only to loathsome enemies
and to my dearest friends.

Conclusion (The Fall)

on the floor
a little death after a livid
orgasm.

numb. all feeling gone.
out of breath.

next to them in the flat
a small fenced balcony
above it a cloudless sky.

Calmed and carefully
 she rolls off him
pulls on white, silk undies
and walks out onto the balcony
to breathe and sigh.

She bends over the railing
her breasts rest on the metal.

She turns around and speaks
in a soft, detached voice:
“Where’s your accent from?”

Still on his back, buckling his belt
he answers automatically, reluctantly:
– *Iran . . . in the middle east . . . under Russia and Turkey . . . next to . . .*

“I know where Iran is. I used to be an airhostess. What was your name again?”

– *Arash. That’s Uh
rash. It’s Old Persian
 meaning ‘truthful’.*

She grins and says: “Do you wanna know the truth then, Persian Prince?”

He rolls on the floor, looking
at her beautifully curved back
and answers:

 – *You can start by telling me if you’re on the pill ’cos
otherwise . . .*

But she hasn’t heard him
and spreads her arms
an inspired female Christ
her evangelist, blue eyes

scan the City's concrete panorama.

She says
in a raising, disturbed tone:

“You believe in Heaven and Hell in Iran?”

– *You didn't even give me the chance to put on a condo . . . what?*
Heaven and . . . ??? Eh?

A cool stream
terrified tears
glaze her dimples:

“It's hell. Burning all the time.
The City. Remember that . . . this is it . . .”

and head-first
throws herself over the railing.

DARREN HANLON

Darren Hanlon is an Australian singer/songwriter who plays urban folk music. He has released five solo albums, three EPs and eight singles on Candle Records and Flippin Yeah industries, as well as several compilation tracks. After the dissolving of Candle Records he has started his own pseudo-label called Flippin Yeah Industries in 2008.

There have been eight video clips made of his songs "Happiness is a Chemical", "Hiccups", "A to Z", "Elbows", "The Unmade Bed", "Fingertips & Mountaintops", "All These Things", "Electric Skeleton" and the latest "Butterfly Bones" starring Bob Ellis, Rhys Muldoon and Jessica Tovey.

Before becoming a solo artist in 1999, he was a member of the Simpletons, and contributed backing guitar and keyboards for the Lucksmiths, the Dearhunters, and Mick Thomas.

Darren is known for his engagement with his audiences, through his down-to-earth storytelling at live gigs as well as his often charming lyrics. Additionally, he is known for his quirky videos, including I Wish That I Was Beautiful For You which starred Darren himself alongside Eli Wallach. He has toured with Billy Bragg, David Dondero, Tim Kasher, Violent Femmes, and The Magnetic Fields and has recently completed his latest album I Will Love You At All, released on 16 July 2010 in Australia (Flippin' Yeah) and 21 September in the United States (Yep Roc).

Darren Hanlon grew in a place described in tourist brochures as: "the town that saved Queensland". The grandiose statement refers to the discovery of gold in Gympie in 1867. The house overlooking the river in the Southside of the regional town contained his parents, his sister and their scant record collection but it seemed the two albums played continually were Kenny Rodgers 'Greatest Hits' and Slim Dustys 'This is Your Life' which they'd all listen to from their rooms at bedtime. "We might even get to hear side 2 if dad stayed awake long enough to get out of bed and turn it over," he remembers.

Scarily, his musical education could have started and ended there if it wasn't for a music teacher from a rival school who lived on his street. Owning a record collection that spanned 3 double arm lengths and 4 shelves high, it was from this stack miscellaneous enlightening gems would be plucked at random on the afternoons Hanlon would arrive uninvited. Whether or not the teacher put them on to actually educate this inquisitive rural nerd or simply shut him up was unimportant. He would sit there bug-eyed hearing everything from the Sex Pistols to the Smiths for the first time (and that was just the selections under "S"). The pestered neighbour eventually moved away but Hanlon found his new address by simply asking another teacher.

Fleeing Queensland after high school to Music College in Lismore his eyes were opened wider. If one would visit the town now it's hard to imagine that at the time it was a hotbed for original music and creative energy. From a long list of local bands, the 7 or so venues would fill their chalk boards most nights of the week, Hanlons favourite being University art-pop combo, Playground. He slowly got to know them by loaning them his guitar leads and was soon asked to join as guitarist,

was fired on grounds of being "too country" and then rejoined in time to record their first EP under new name 'The Simpletons' and with them he toured Australia for the first time. Over five or so years, standing stage right of songwriting genius Shane Gelagin, he was happy to embellish tunes rather than build them. "To witness Shane working out songs was equally awe-inspiring and intimidating. He had limited musical background so therefore had no pre-conceived ideas on harmonic or melodic theory. He made his own rules. I wouldn't dare try compete."

But songs did slowly materialise over that period, mainly written for friends to perform at parties, some of them intended to be played once at the most. By the time the Simpletons dissolved messily at the Plantation Hotel in Coffs Harbour, Hanlon had a small but growing rucksack of tunes that he started performing on low-key early weeknights in venues around Sydney. After a brief stint touring as guitarist/keyboardist for Simpletons label mates the Lucksmiths and the Dearhunters and a year with Weddings, Parties, Anything leader Mick Thomas, Hanlon was finally convinced by Candle records mogul Chris Crouch to commit some of his songs to tape.

Getting the 'Early Days' EP out of the way quickly and heading to America for a whistlestop greyhound bus tour, national radio at home picked up on an unlikely banjo driven last-minute track called Falling Aeroplanes that meant he had some kind of career to return to. "I'm as surprised as anyone" he was heard muttering at the time.

During the recording of 'Hello Stranger' in 2002, Hanlon collaborated with drummer/instrumentalist Bree van Reyk on a couple of tracks and a musical partnership was formed which came to full fruition when the pair travelled to Tucson, Arizona in 2004 to record the next collection of songs. This time not only did Van Reyk contribute all percussion but also helped with a lot of arrangement and melodic ideas as well calming his nerves on turbulent plane journeys. They both bought ice-creams from a little shop under Wavelab Studios served by Mexican children. The words 'Little Chills' were crudely written on a piece of paper stuck to the window and were soon stolen by Hanlon and van Reyk to be the banner under which the new recordings would lie. The success of this album slingshot the pair into fairly constant touring splattered throughout Australia and the rest of the globe it belongs to.

In 2005 Darren moved to Oxford, UK to live for 7 months. His writing for the next project was interrupted briefly with a couple of trips to Scandinavia to support and play in that years line-up of Ladybug Transistor, as well as yet another tour in the US with NY's the Magnetic Fields. _ We first played together in Australia years ago and got along quite well. They seem to think I'm low maintenance and that suits them. I'm not sure how. I've lost a backpack, guitar and a passport while touring with them. But hey, they keep asking me back and I'm not complaining._

After returning home to Australia in 2006 plans were made to record the next album in a place that meant a lot to the singer spiritually and geographically. The Majestic Theatre in Pomona, QLD is but a few kms from the Hanlon family farm and Darren spent a good few Sunday matinees trying to get comfortable in the lumpy old seats there. His own grandmother attended school dances there and now years later the building could boast being the oldest operational silent movie theatre in the world.

Darren, Bree and good friend Mark Manone (Lucksmiths) ensconced themselves in the pub opposite and for 2 weeks recorded the album 'Fingertips and Mountaintops.' This would also mark the first of a long collaboration between Hanlon and Portland, OR piano/trumpet wiz Cory Gray (Carcrashlander) who flew

to Australia to contribute. _ We'd met while I was recording at Type Foundry Studios in Portland and hit it off. _ Cory has been playing piano since he was 2 years old and you can hear that it's instinctual when he plays. He dreams up grand, nostalgic, mournful tunes in his sleep. _

Hanlon added lyrics to one of these very tunes for his first co-write, included on the album as 'Old Dream.'

'Fingertips and Mountaintops' yielded radio songs and new live favourites which began a relentless touring schedule for the next few years and yet another support tour with the Magnetic Fields, this time in Europe.

In early 2009 a Rarities collection was released called 'Pointing Rayguns at Pagans'. Other stuff happened around this time but lets face it, he's not Sir Edmund Hillary. If you've read this far, Congratulations. That's the problem with these things: he records, he tours, he records, he tours.

And as you've probably guessed already this is me writing this. Hi. Well who else is gonna do it? And yes I did feel stupid being in third person and typing out all those quotations. But they are all things I've said! Or at least thought.

Better finish this thing. I'm going back in...

This year heralds 9 years of 'Darren Hanlon the Artist.' In a few months it'll become double figures which will mean all this is no longer a hobby.

An easily distracted pinball/crossword addict Hanlon now lives wherever and walks the streets with empty notebooks. "I find buying note books more inspiring than writing in them. They're just so perfect and pure, like a blank canvas or unflavoured tofu. I don't want to ruin it by writing in them."

Falling Aeroplanes

Boy threw his guitar down and started beating his brow;
No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't justify.
All a waste of time spent inventing words and rhyme
As the stars and the planets and the clock did laps.

You see, making up songs is for losers.
I should build something she uses,
Like a box or a bed or cupboards or shelves,
'Cause songs are made of air, they can't be any use to her.
Better off try'na catch falling aeroplanes.

Then girl said:
"Boy don't be so stupid, boy don't be so daft,
You're not even right by half.
And although you say your songs are fundamentally air,
There's also thousands of vibrations that stimulate the ear

In such a way that, whenever I hear them,
They always make me smile.
They're just as tactile as a box or a bed or cupboards or shelves.
So, boy, now stop your moping, cursing and no hoping,
And get back in the saddle."

While she was still speaking,
Towards his feet reaching, where lay his guitar.
His head was swimming in an alphabet
Soup, letters swirled and words formed in his heart.

He said:
"I'm gonna build a song for us,
With four verses and a chorus,
On real estate your words inspired;
And there we'll live rent-free,
Sleep on beds of melody,
And leave the key-change with the seasons."

And so that song he built was hers,
With a chorus and four verse,
And she woke to find him finally asleep.

Happiness is a Chemical

On the glass that wraps the telephone box
An impatient bystander knocks
The receiver, put it back down in its place.
Some things should be said to the face;
I'm a believer.

You're stripped of all your worldly powers
And staring at the opposite apartment block for hours,
You say that each window is just a TV channel,
And you'd surrender all your so-called friends for flowers,

And you'd rather be sleeping in the paddocks with the horses
While the stars cross the skies on their prescribed courses.
Can you take me with you when you go?

Because love is just a lazy generalisation
That we use for 100 different feelings and as many situations.
Going through each other's pockets is not like us
And flattery should get you somewhere
And your happiness is just a chemical,
A constant feeling you're being watched,
All your good intentions so clumsily botched,
A kiss sent down the telephone line can come out sounding like a bug getting
squashed.

And grasshoppers fling erratic parabolas
While you're drowning ants with your can of cola.
Can you take me with you when you go?

Because love is just a lazy generalisation
That we use for 100 different feelings and as many situations.
Going through each other's pockets is not like us
And flattery should get you somewhere
And your happiness is just a chemical,
It's just a chemical.

Separate the parts and give them titles.
Lungs are for songs and eyes are for feasting
And butter's for a bee sting.
Can somebody please check my vitals?

Because love is just a lazy generalisation
That we use for 100 different feelings and as many situations.
Finding things other's pockets isn't always a plus
And that sensation that you felt up the back of the bus is just a chemical,
Yeah, happiness is just a chemical,
Yeah it is.

Fingertips and Mountaintops

On the Town Hall stairs
They're sunbaking in pairs.
You try not to look suspicious
But there's always someone
Happy to remind you
It snuck up behind you.
Everything slowed sown
And then you came undone,
And first your hands don't work;
They're babies waiting to be born,
And then your lips don't work
And someone's leaning on your horn.
I came as fast as I could;
The street spun under my feet.
If it doesn't rain then it's a beautiful fountain
And if you place a finger in front of your face
And close one eye, you can block out a mountain,
And then your mind takes flight
Like it received a glancing blow
And then your legs don't feel right.
You're sprouting roots where once were toes,
You wish to burn up the whole night
And wake up in the same clothes.

All by itself, magically the day begins
And all across the world that costs nothing
Past silent cars, single-filed up the street,
Though they're all gone now, they sure really took a beating.
It could make you depressed but maybe it's for the best
That all we ever came to know for real was fleeting
Like fire and wood,
A hairless chest,
Most electrical goods,
And pop starlets.
I'll tear the house down board by board
So you might believe it yet.

Without our help, magically the day begins
And all across that costs nothing.

I Wish That I Was Beautiful For You

I wish that I was beautiful for you.
I wish that I inspired tiny fireworks inside the way you do,
So delicately made,
A prayer left unprayed
Before the morning sky fades
Up to blue,
And I wish that I was beautiful for you.

I wish that somehow I could find a pill
For a quick fix, modern tonic that would change me with one swallow, I would.

Watch folks line up to pay,
Stare at me all day,
But I'd turn them all away
If that be thy will.
One tiny little innocuous pill,
But a wish is just a pin
In a swimming pool of needles.
If for one night you need the room,
I wish to be your tomb,
You can lie in me.

Is it possible I've other things you need
But to be worthy of a single page out of one of those magazines you read
As glossy as a mirror
But mirrors never lie,
They're difficult on the eye.
It's true
And I wish that I was beautiful for you.

I dreamed that we were travelling on a bus,
Speeding along an unnamed plain towards somewhere and nowhere there was
us.
Our hands lay useless in our laps
Like beetles on their backs.

We came to a stretch of road where a fire
Had burned the edges all along, it looked as though the highway wore eyeliner.
You kissed me by surprise
When I opened my eyes.
You'd turned into some old guy.
I screamed.
But don't forget of all these things I've only dreamed.

If for one night you need the room,
I will be your tomb.
You can lie in me.

JOSH PYKE

b. 1977

Josh Pyke is an Australian singer-songwriting musician. Pyke released his debut album, *Memories & Dust*, on 10 March 2007 and it debuted at no.4 on the Australian ARIA Album Chart. He also guest programmed *rage* on that date. The lead single from the new album, entitled "Lines on Palms", hit Australian airwaves in mid-January. When fans pre-ordered *Memories & Dust* through the fanclub website, they received a bonus CD of the live private show Josh did at The Wesley Anne in Northcote, Victoria in 2006.

Josh Pyke performed at the 'Escape to the Park' concert in King's Park, Perth, Western Australia alongside The Panda Band, Tex Perkins, Sarah Blasko and Augie March. He also performed at the 2006-2007 Falls Festival in Lorne, Victoria and Marion Bay, Tasmania on New Year's Eve.

He also sang a cover version of "Wuthering Heights" by Kate Bush for No Man's Woman which was released in 2007.

In April 2007 his debut album, *Memories & Dust*, was nominated for a J Award by Triple J.

Pyke also picked up an ARIA for best adult contemporary album at the 2007 ARIA awards.

Pyke features in the Triple J Hottest 100 countdowns. "Memories and Dust" and "Private Education" were voted number 38 and 57 respectively in the Triple J Hottest 100 of 2006, "Lines on Palms", "Sew My Name" and "Forever Song" finished in 79th, 91st and 97th place in the Triple J Hottest 100 of 2007.

Pyke's Third album "Only Sparrows" was released 19 August 2011 and debuted at #4 on the ARIA Charts. Written on the road and in New York City and recorded back home with ARIA Award-winning producer Wayne Connolly, *Only Sparrows* is an album that saw Pyke take a leap as an artist.

In late November 2011 Pyke released a new song off his album, singing harmonies with Katy Steele from Perth, now living in New York, in the intimate new song 'Punch in the Heart.' Its video sees both singers in a split-screen view performing twin one-take recordings singing to the camera.

For the 2011 annual ARIA Awards, Pyke was nominated for 3 awards: Best Male Artist, and with Wayne Connolly- Engineer Of The Year and Producer of The Year.

The Lighthouse Song

And I've been getting urges late at night
To walk and walk for days and throughout lights
Through people's houses, picking food from plates
Through people's gardens, picking locks on gates.

So we are moving to a lighthouse, you and I,
While seas drown sailors, we'll be locked up safe and dry,
And though our doors may knock and rattle in the wind
I'll just hold you tight and we'll not let those fuckers in.

And I've been leaving gifts out in the woods
That someone might stumble upon and wonder at their origins,
I've been feeling like a fox with sad old eyes
Whose skulk has all moved on to leave the dark and empty den behind.

So we are moving to a lighthouse, you and I,
While seas drown sailors, we'll be locked up safe and dry,
And though our doors may knock and rattle in the wind
I'll just hold you tight and we'll not let those fuckers in.

I'll anull these little walls of attrition and these invocations
That's seen me holding my camera out at arm's length
To self-document these new locations
When I should be leaning against you
Deciding on things to get done
And you should be leaning on fountains
And filling my space up and breathing the air from my lungs.

So we are moving to a lighthouse, you and I,
While seas drown sailors, we'll be locked up safe and dry,
And we are moving to a lighthouse, you and I,
Our beams will burn the clouds to beacons in the sky,
And though our doors may knock and rattle in the wind,
The wind...
I'll just hold you tight and we'll not let those fuckers in!

Middle of the Hill

When I was a kid I grew up in a house on a hill,
Not the top, not the bottom, but the middle,
And I still remember where I cracked my head
In the vacant lot, there's a row of tiny houses there now.

And we used to light fires in the gutters
And I could cool my head on the concrete steps
But the girl down the street hit my sister
On the head with a stick,

And we hid behind my father
As he knocked on the parents' door
To tell the them what she did
But the parents were drunk
So they really didn't give a shit!

And the girl down the street said a dog couldn't bark
'Cause a man with an axe cut its voicebox out
But my older sister told me that it prob'ly wasn't true
And I believe what she said 'cause she took me by the hand.

One time when a coupla men drove down the hill in a white van
Said there was a phone box filled with money 'round the corner
And I woulda gone along but she took me by the hand
To the house in the middle of the hill,
In the middle of the hill, in the middle of the hill.

And my mother knew the words to a lot of different songs
And we'd always sing the harmonies, yeah, we'd sing along.
She had cold, cold hands when the fever hit
And then the noises that the trains made
Sounded like people in my head,

And the stories that the ceiling told
Through the pictures and the grains in the pine wood boards,
And let me stay outside 'til the sky went red,
And I could cool my head on the concrete steps,

And you could never really see the top from the bottom,
But I don't pay enough attention
To the good things when I got 'em,
And you could never really see the top from the bottom.

I don't pay enough attention
To the good things when I got 'em,
I don't pay enough attention
To the good things when I got 'em.

I don't pay enough attention
To the good things when I got 'em.
I don't pay enough attention
To the good things when I got 'em.

Memories And Dust

First I was a hatching
Waiting for my little bones to form,
Next I was a fledgling
Leaping from the nest, despite the fall.
Oh they fall, how we fall!

But if I speak to you of days upon the ocean,
I can speak to you of memories and dust,
There won't be time for all of us,
I know there won't be time for all of us.

I landed in the garden
Longing for the view behind the fence.
Oh my God, I prayed my bones weren't brittle
For the air we float on can feel dense.
Oh, the weight of it aches!

But if I speak to you of days upon the ocean,
I can speak to you of memories and dust,
There won't be time for all us,
I know there won't be time for all of us.

'Cause I saw two fall before they were ready to
And I found no sense or gain to bear the cost.
Comfort comes to those with faith in mysterious ways
But for me faith don't make up for what we lost.

But if I speak to you of days upon the ocean,
I can speak to you of memories and dust.
There won't be time for all us,
I know there won't be time for all of us.

But in the morning, I can smell you on my pillow,
I need to know we won't get wrung out in the wash,
I need to know there's time for us,
I must believe there's time for some of us.

'Cause I saw two fall before they were ready to,
And I found no sense or gain to bear the cost.
Comfort comes to those with faith in mysterious ways
But for me faith don't make up for what we lost.

MICHELLE CAHILL

Michelle Cahill is a Goan-Anglo-Indian writer who lives in Sydney. She writes poetry, fiction and essays. Her second collection *Vishvarûpa* was shortlisted in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. She received the Val Vallis Award and was highly commended in the Blake Poetry Prize.

Her poems are anthologised in *30 Australian Poets*, Ed. Felicity Plunkett (UQP) the *HarperCollins Anthology of Modern English Poetry* Ed. Sudeep Sen, *Contemporary Australian Poets* (Turnrow) Ed. John Kinsella and *The Yellow Nib Anthology of Modern English Poetry by Indians* (QUP, Belfast) Ed. Sudeep Sen and Ciaran Carson. She was a fellow at Hawthornden Castle and Sanskriti Kendra International Retreat.

From 2013 Cahill will be the CAL/UOW International Writing Fellow at Kingston University, London

Childhood

The afternoon cruises,
after badminton, lemonade
and chutney sandwiches.
Voices are like ribbon made
for unwrapping the past.
Syllables of imaginary laughter
blend with the real, as I recall
the warmth of uncles, aunts, cousins
left behind in foreign cities,
Mumbai, London, Goa.
I think of the bright day when dad
flew our kite on Primrose Hill.
It's hard to say what matters.
Everything fragments,
defers to time's calibrations,
the long shadows are deceptive.

I piggy-back my daughter
in summer's leaf-light.
We swim laps in tandem
riding a pink foam noodle, sinking fast,
her tiny arms a choker for my neck.
I'm weak to her commands, her tears.
In any competition, I must lose.
The dragonfly's flight is a tease
never kissing its reflection,
a cross-stitch lacing the pool.
The distant hum of the freeway
sounds like a hole in the heart,
the softest turbulence.
The garden is a green humidicrib.

Houbara

Like the falconer, you prize her aphrodisiacs.
Shy, endangered bird, migrating from the steppes
to breed in the warm air of this Empty Quarter.

You imagine she fears a fleet of four-wheel-drives,
campsites, the majlis, where a hooded falcon dreams.
How she dreads the tea boys' songs, a generator

droning all night long in the desert. By daybreak
the hunt begins. You search for evidence, while
a convoy chases her tracks, car phones screaming

over dry, rutted riverbeds sprayed with Artemisia.
Like the falconer you've learned how to creep from
impotence to ambush, how the ground will surely

betray her, how a gyr untethered, his sight restored,
quickly gains height over her slow, deliberate
wingbeats. You watch him swoop to Earth's face.

He points from the dunes, he circles her, melding
in a riot of awkward feathers. She cannot be twisted
back, her neck a broken string he jabs in agony.

Dawn cauterises the sky. The falconer retrieves
her damaged carcass with a piece of chicken meat
to treat the hunter. You know his aftertaste of want.

The Vanishing

They hung me upside down
by the tail, molecules starched—
those Irish trackers, old-timers.
I was tribal, a trophy locked
with rigor mortis.
They forced my abysmal jaw,
my cough worthy of attention.
I would make no apology for stray
dogs who seized their pregnant ewes,
if I could speak.
Dingos took blame for the cull.
I've seen the You Tube videos
of Benjamin calibrating hunger
to a charcoaled thirl, eyes barred,
his hectored shadow.
How in God's name they shot a pack
of us, huddled with hungry cubs.
Sold a batch to Europe as domestics.
Kept me— as mascot, emblem,
field study, postage stamp,
zoology enigma
(stuffed on a taxidermist's plinth.)
When the last in captivity died
without too much fuss—
they dumped him in a paddock.
Have I slept for a week already?
A finger puppet in snow, a Visitorian?
The post identity theory and cli-fi symposium
may never make amends. Before Twitter
or the allegory goes viral
I'll escape into ferneries, veils of Time
from the experts, bureaucrats, Lake
St Clair's crags, from grotto to Sphinx,
jerking all the levers—till they
vanish from my world.

The Stinking Mantra

I lay her under a camellia bush by the stone Buddha,
where a cherry blossom scattered its confetti karma,
where azaleas flourished and minah birds convened.
Her pelt had been tattooed by a powerline. Night fell.
I almost forgot her because I was exhausted,
because I couldn't sleep, bypassing all attendant
thought of mourning. Outside the brushwood
stirred with native ghostings: her kind, not the shape
of hunger but death's apprentice slipping through trees,
their wire fingers scuffed against sky. The mist paused,
as if it were autumn, the trees were bare tightropes.
By daylight there were catkins, magpies broke the dawn,
the sky pinned back its rain. Leaves were floating carp,
wisteria festooned desiccated gardens. I walked past lilies
with elephant ears swaying in the sun, a stop sign pulled
out from the ground by schoolboys. All this to slake me,
to dress my grief: these things with names to keep or to speak
as if articulation made of thought a substance.
Words, falling softly as feathers or pollen. How many words
might a woman discern? And what of a small marsupial
shocked by current, mid-climb, lit-up in free-fall?
What made me crush a blossom of wisteria to sprinkle
over the small, dead thing? Away I went to read the day's
diffuse paragraphs, to bluff my way through colouring-in,
a daughter's grammar. She ties toys with paperclip chains,
devices infinite to bind or to banish. Cars flew by,
a truck with a skip-bin, birds scavenged from the tarmac.
Up close, the possum smelt like rancid butter. I sat with
her and smoked, hearing nothing. No pity, no slight
for what I'd named her, Sweet Shadow-Playing Funambulist.
What was the harm? I might call her a crumpled stocking,
a ripple in the field, or a girl's dismembered evidence.
The swing tempts her back. Trucks pass rudely in the valley.
Soon her mouth began to fizz, filling with a residue
creamy as boot polish and everything pregnant with heat.
So the riddle of days, walking from doorstep to driveway
then back to school. Disgusting, my daughter said.
For at last the maggots came, teeming in the possum's
stopped, burned mouth. The air smelt of stewed semen,
the tongue like a black orchid, half-severed, dangled
and torqued. So the tongue swayed and in the fraying sleep
of my fatigue I could hear the quiet vowels, rising from
wisteria, from the hot ground, and falling back into silence.

Storm

As they walked along the beach, a strong southerly had whipped up the waves. The lake had broken its bank so they took off their shoes to wade through the sandflats. The wind was against them, and there were dead birds strewn every few metres, victims of a cyclone off the coast. She knew the storm must have been a long way out to sea because the lightning was unspoken, without thunder. The girl wasn't tired but after half an hour she sat with him; his steroid-inflated body folding in a heap. The sky was a coruscation of stars. It was too dark to see the sets but the white foam rushed and swirled like the crest of a wild stallion. They lay on the sand, amongst the wrack and the seaweed, tangled in each other's arms. When they kissed it felt so strong, so connected, she thought she could get addicted to that feeling. Later she rolled a joint; crumbling and breaking the weed with her fingers, tucking the paper edges with the tips of her thumbs, wrapping it firmly, wetting the glue. They passed it between themselves. Fishermen sat on fold up chairs with their buckets beside them. Their taut, invisible lines disappeared into the night haze. There was something freaky, like a presence out there. Dead sea grass lay in mounds along the shore. The town glittered at the southern end of the beach, and in the nearby houses fairy lights shone on Christmas trees. They could hear laughter and jeers coming from those houses. She was partial to the charms of Christmas, but he was indifferent. For some time he lay motionless on the sand, while the girl ran down to the surf. Teasing the water, entering by degrees, she could just make out the gnarly outline of pohutukawas dangling from the cliff face. She remembered their oystery smell. He once said that falling in love was like a dance between two people; he was ignorant of the steps, how to lead or follow. The girl was naked, leaning and somersaulting, streamline in the face of the waves. When he joined her he, too, was naked. The tide was coming in, bringing dense clumps of algae and kelp, which wrapped in slimy bracelets around their ankles and thighs.

L.K. HOLT

b. 1982

L.K. (Lucy) Holt was born in 1982 in Melbourne, Australia, spent her childhood in Adelaide and returned to Melbourne to study history. She began to write poems by way of the visual arts and experienced it as a liberation, because she had more control over words than over paint, clay and pencils. Ted Hughes's *Crow* was the first collection that overwhelmed Holt. Other influences on her work have been Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell, John Donne and Anne Carson.

She has published two books of poetry so far. Her debut collection, *Man Wolf Man* (2009), was awarded the Kenneth Slessor Prize, while for *Patience, Mutiny* (2010) she received the Grace Leven Prize. L.K. Holt was the editor of *Blast: Poetry & Critical Writing*, and currently she is the editor of the webzine *So Long Bulletin of Australian Poetry & Criticism*.

Her poems, in which birds, the world of nature and historical characters feature prominently, read like small sculptures composed of set scenes and language:

*I watch now the birds
so I do not have to watch myself.*

Holt is not shy of employing neologisms to give her images an extra layer. For instance, she fuses 'subjects' and 'objects' to make 'sobjects', and in another poem her grandmother and a moth combine to form grandmoth. She views her poetry as an 'exacting science', and her aim is "to find truths and patterns and equivalents in the smallest details of human experience".

*Even without faith
there's always a best-case scenario.*

The poems breathe an atmosphere of concern with the future; they are sometimes sombre, sometimes cheerful and occasionally carefree, but they are always permeated with melancholy and a sense of tradition.

"I agree with Da Vinci when he says that art lives from limitations and dies from freedom." Holt is thought of as a neo-Formalist because her poems often have a recognisable form (sonnets, villanelles or sestinas). At the same time she is very free in her treatment of these forms. Her 'long sonnets' have an extra quatrain and she uses half and quarter rhymes instead of the customary full end rhymes. And when, for once, a sonnet looks unimpeachable, like 'Shipbreaking', for instance, a feeling of slight alienation is embedded in the last line: "Take a piece. Break it in half. And in half again."

After the Eternal Protest

He takes a long live minute of ticking senses
to know it was a rubber bullet homed at his forehead,
sitting among the hats and sandals remaining
like bronzes; live-time memorials to a cause
that presumes its loss to give its hope a wildness.
He bleeds down his best shirt, worn in case of death,
now ruined with survival; his concussion sparkling
like a wet shook net; his blood unnoted,
misused on asphalt . . . still he wants it back
as kin do their fallen. The frontline runs past him,
strange and normal again in their single skins
and desire for dinner. Someone slows to pull him up
and is off, leaving him in a standing spangled sway,
suddenly ill with the idea of sacrifice and okay.

Shipbreaking

At oldest moon the tanker is aimed at shore
and scuttled like a much smaller thing;
its prow cocked in the unnatural questioning
of a carcass head; its waterlines, doing marked done.
Empty oil-barrels thrown to sea, herded to shore,
then the loosest fittings, then steeliest ego-structure:
all parts can be turned to mutiny in the end.
In the hull's darkness a man, as taken as Jonah,
falls off a girder and ends forty feet below,
straddling a crossbeam that splits his pelvis in two.

Cross-sections shape-shift in the conflicting light
—a bone cathedral, a bombed housing block—
as the boss explains the job to the new boy.
Take a piece. Break it in half. And in half again.

Love's Poem

for M & N & O

My once lover saw an old door, then saw a table in it;
he changed its plane forever like death does for us;
gave it strong legs to never move on and crowned it
with a cut-glass bowl of just-in-season fruit.
Years later, my friend saw this table, then saw
a garden bench in it; she studied long and leisurely,
planning her feat of hard wood origami; she sawed,
hammered and made it with nothing added or spared.
Love's a like proteanism; the open promise of all
things to be its evidence, with a mere new morning's look.
This new morning on our garden bench, we give
room to the bird-shit begun in the fig-tree above,
we give thanks to our births well-timed and placed;
we'll give, good-grained hearts, till we're taken away.

Self Portrait

from LONG SONNETS OF LEOCADIA

After his first near-miss with death he drew himself;
reduced by one sense, his ears extinct, hidden behind
a black halo. One eye looks at himself, a taut unfelt
line from body to thought. The other eye is misaligned,

lowered by the weight of being watched, fearfully
re-alive. On a badge above his heart he signed
his name upside-down, the savant's reminder pinned
to the idiot. The second time the nearness was finer,

Fate-crones near enough to hold the backcloth for
a self-portrait with doctor as a still-life prop,
propping him up gently in the bed I made not for
death but to approximate married life. You cannot

see me standing at the foot of the bed; a visitation
made see-through with exhaustion. I saw my father
dying behind the Señor's death-mask face; Señor
saw in me all the women he formed with the fewest

possible strokes, each lovely face the same worded prayer
but with a different want. I just wanted him spared.

*Poets's Note: One of 8 poems in the voice of Leocadia Zorilla de Weiss,
Francisco Goya's housekeeper and mistress until his death.*

BELLA LI

b. 1983

Bella Li is a Melbourne poet. Born in northeastern China, she immigrated to Australia with her parents in 1986 at the age of three. Since graduating with a double degree in arts and law from the University of Melbourne, and a major in English literature, she has worked as a research assistant, judge's associate, proofreader and editor.

Bella Li's current interests lie in the intersections and correlations between poetry, history, photography and space, and in prose poetry as a distinct form. Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, Michael Ondaatje's *Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and the short fiction of Borges are some of the texts that have influenced the shape and direction of her poetry. After an extended period of travel, she will be returning to the University of Melbourne to begin a PhD in creative writing, focusing on the works of three twentieth-century American poets in the theoretical component of her thesis.

Li's poems have been published in journals including *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Otoliths* and *Mascara Literary Review*, and anthologised in the *Paradise Poetry Anthology*, *Best Australian Poems 2012* and the forthcoming *Puncher & Wattman Asian-Australian anthology*. A chapbook of her work will be published by Vagabond Press, as part of the limited edition Rare Objects Series, in late 2013.

Voyage

Sullen days. The corsair moves mechanically on its hinges. Beneath our proscenium arch wily ports ply their trade, measuring out the hours in skeletons and lampshades. The hold littered with props. Flat clouds drifting idly along the cardboard coast. (In the dawn they emerge, pale with grief.) I cannot remember biding time in the shallows with the air so steep. And the space behind the sun growing and growing, the stalls silent and empty on quiet nights. There were months when great shadows fell across the waves. And we moved, so it seemed, through lost oceans, past sunken islands from which the sounds of mourning stole. It is true that the flight was exhausting: my eyes reeked of distance. But when the blackness lifted, the horizon—beyond the dim circle of lights—remained featureless, unaltered. Now the shapes of our desires do not change but mimic, with each curtainfall, the appearance of a predictable set of stars. When evening transpires (at the appointed time, in the appointed place), the tide reverses; our loyal machines rise, assemble themselves across the deck. Wolf-like, sand-like. Waiting for that same, slow mirage: the familiar moon, hung from its lamprey sky. Swinging guilt.

Winter

It was not for this that we awoke. Stark trees, yes, and the hour of your coming it was. Like lightning through the grove. It was but a slaughter of bees travelling fast. Travelling still. And beyond the hill Mother England—fighting on her ship at sea. Our homeward vessel moored and bound. Harder and greener and further away the land. Slower the tides. The brackish water. The too-long winter. Nested into itself the coming spring. Travelling slow. Swallows and dying and a flight into stillness we go. We go. Into the pilgrim light. With a frame of bones to mark. The edge of the sky from time.

Just Then

Just then “the water began to fall quite quietly”. We were sitting on a rock ledge with little Jimmy at Goose Lake, waiting for the goose. It was lovely and floral on the shore (it wasn’t often you saw chintz in the wild). The sun was setting over the lake, which gave it a charming wet look, but no goose. It had begun late in the afternoon, like one of those long, warm evenings in New York when ad executives loosen their ties and all the secretaries start taking their clothes off in the street. It had begun like a hole in a bank wall, spitting money. Had it ended? Here on the shores of Goose Lake? Ah, California! I’d give my arm/leg for a shovel and a fat wheelbarrow. All the juicy oranges getting juicier. All the furry marmots running about, eating nuts to pass the time. To tell the truth, Jane said, “to tell the truth it’s been three weeks”. The oranges were silent. Nobody said anything except the marmots, cunningly chewing their nuts. She was right—it had been three weeks and the bastard hadn’t shown up. I thought about my secretary. Little Jimmy shifted uncomfortably on the ledge but didn’t complain. The lake lost its floral aspect. The water was falling horizontally and also, now, quietly.

Window

When you enter the room it is through the door at the end
of a long corridor. The door is painted red but the room
is blue. The body of the man sits at the table in the far
right-hand corner. It does not move. The twisted cord
you pick up from the ground next to his shiny black
shoes is as stiff as a malt whiskey and just as good.
There is a radio on the table. There is a radio on
the table playing Cagney playing Bogart playing
himself. The radio is listening to you. You are
listening to what is coming through the open
window even though it makes no sound
even though it is as silent as the man
in the chair. Something coming
through the window and you
can feel the hairs on your
neck do their little dance
and when you exit as
you must now that
you have entered
it is through
the win
do
w.

In the room the curtains move.
In the room the curtains move.

Drowning Dream

That August I began to dream of drowning. It was the season of water—strange storms troubled the air. All day I crept along the edges of rooms, avoiding the precious windows—half ajar, propped open with old newspapers—where the green sky pooled. Outside, whole oceans flooded the garden, encroaching on the house and its sagging porch. On the first floor the eaves—swollen, bloated with salt. On the second the mirrors, weeping sodden light; the carpets stained with moisture. On the third I studied the ceiling for cracks through which the rain might bloom. The attic and the landing damp. The skirting and the sideboards. The clocks. Only once (in the afternoon) I moved down to the basement, where a man—quiet and still as a mouse—floated face-down in the dark. Above us, the house hummed like a machine.

South of the Water

South of the water, Miss Myra lifts her hoop skirts across a minor abyss in the barroom floor. She sits delicately, whiskey sour in hand, near the window with the air blank and brooding (demoniac?) behind her. Outside the earth churns its muddy music; West Wind blowing, carrying the smell of burning and flesh, knives in the parlour, while an old slave bends to the ground, acutely watching the horizon with his ears. The sound that rises—clear, metallic, far down, down, down but coming up through the damp and the ice and six feet of frozen turnips—it goes: fan blades flicking, saloon doors swinging, ceiling shadows, hand around a drink—Miss Myra, teeth blinking, smiling like a villain.

THE HERD

The Herd formed in 2001 after the core members of Elefant Traks record label decided to collaborate rather than submit individual tracks for a compilation. They retreated from the city for weekends and days off to record at a lakeside house on the Central Coast. What resulted was the self-titled album that featured the Triple J (national youth broadcast radio station) hit 'Scallops', a song that became an Aussie backyard anthem.

In mid-2002, The Herd put the final touches on the follow-up album, called *An Elefant Never Forgets*. What started out as a group of individuals working together had now developed into a tight and cohesive band, with members performing shows with each other constantly.

The new album was released in February 2003 amidst the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces. The first single 'Burn Down The Parliament' hit Triple J radio just after the devastating bushfires in Canberra. Fans turned up to the launches in droves, and The Herd became a regular fixture on the road.

The second single, '77%' immediately sparked controversy with print, electronic media and talkback radio hosts like Stan Zemanek. The Sydney Morning Herald ran stories on the song and The Herd while talkback hotlines rang hot with curious and furious callers wanting to know more. Despite the uproar, Triple J continued playing the song and hundreds of listeners requested it, eventually being voted into the Triple J Hottest 100.

After years of solid touring, and two solo albums from Herd members (Urthboy and Unkle Ho), The Herd set up a studio in inner west Sydney and created their most ambitious album to date, *The Sun Never Sets* featuring We Can't Hear You and Under Pressure. The latter featured Jane Tyrrell, female vocalist and good friend, who subsequently joined the band after some memorable guest appearances at the first two launching shows.

Around October 2005, The Herd performed a cover of Redgum's classic anti-war song I Was Only 19 on Triple J's 'Like a Version'. The song instantly connected with audiences and became the most heavily requested song on the station, leading to an extraordinarily moving film clip featuring members of the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia. Redgum's John Schumann became a good friend of the group, recording and performing the song with The Herd. Countless radio, television and print stories followed (including a half hour documentary on Hack, Triple J's current affairs program) and commercial radio picked up the song. It rated in the top 20 in 2006 Triple J Hottest 100 once again.

The Herd's reputation as a fiery and electrifying live group only grew in 2006 & 2007, with high profile spots on festivals, and sold out shows at Sydney's Metro Theatre and Gaelic Club; The Corner in Melbourne and venues across Australia.

2008 saw the release of their 4th album *Summerland*, that debuted at #7 on the ARIA Album charts and reached #2 on the Top 40 Urban Album charts and was nominated for an ARIA. The album went on to win 'Best Independent Urban/Hip Hop Album' at the AIR (Australian Independent Record Labels Association) Awards that year. The lead single was 'The King is Dead', and their flip clip for '2020' (directed by the talented Mike Daly) went on to win the J Award for Best Music Video 2008.

One of the Herds personal highlights of 2009 was the 'Cannot buy my soul' concerts with Kev Carmody, Paul Kelly, Tex Perkins and countless others. 2010 saw them have a break from the live circuit while they refocused on working on an new album. The new album is due mid 2011, and the first single 'Sum of it all' is out and available for download by donation on the elefant traks website.

In an unconventional set-up, The Herd perform with two MCs, two singers, an acoustic and an electric guitar, bass, piano accordion, clarinet, laptops and MPC 1000s. It's big!

77%

Cheers. Well, I'm left sitting here staring into a beer
shaking my head at the same ol' loathing and fear,
Stranger in my own land, can't understand
How the very word Australian has been damned.
I fucking hate myself, take 'Aussie' from my name,
Erase this endless shame, forever casting blame.
If you don't act the same will I destroy you?
Everyone looks the same beaten, black and blue,
So I've had enough of these redneck pricks,
When fact is the only real shit that sticks.
Watch as I tear the very skin from my face
So none'll see my race, my deep disgrace.
You're not even from here in the first place
And those that are you wanna further debase.
Nup, no more, never again whether by fist or pen.
I will defend, cos I'm at a loose end
The shattered remnants of Aussie dignity.
I'm a skip, whitey, round-eye surprise me
By using your shrivelled brain to please explain
How the clever country just went down the drain.
We rode the sheep's back now the sheep ride you,
If this is how it's gonna be don't call me 'true blue'.
I denounce my ancestors, wounds still fester.
If you say 'it aint so' I suggest ya' wake up!

(Chorus)

Wake up - this country needs a fucking shake up.
Wake up - these cunts need a shake up.

Talkback squawking hacks won't relax
Until Jones'y, Zemanek and Laws are all axed.
77 percent of aussies are racist
And if you're here, I'll say it your faces:
Rich redneck pricks still hold all the aces.
So I'll buy ya a beer, with an arsenic chaser.
Better off dead? Is that what I've said?
Tempting to take for all the blood you've shed.
No doubt you're as bad as your dads and ya mums.
Mainsteam media making me so fucking glum.
Just anglo reality, intellectual cavities,
Channel 9 fostering prejudiced mentalities.
I won't be a casualty, just mention casually
That I can't stand for you shit-eating bullies.
Preying on peeps without a mainstream voice,
Most of you stay silent but I've got no choice.

(Chorus)

Well I've yelled my lungs out but to no avail,
Well I've yelled my lungs out but to no avail,
Well I've yelled my lungs out but to no fukin' avail
That you're a stranger yourself now that's the sting in the tail!
Captain Cook was the very first queue jumper,
It was immigrant labour that made Australia plumper.
Enough is enough, whiteys go pack your stuff.
Don't wanna live in England? That's fucking tough.
I'm sick and tired of this redneck wonderland.
Most've you stay silent and I can't understand.
I just can't understand (understand).

I Was Only 19

Mum, Dad and Denny
were some amongst many
who turned up to see the passing out parade at Puckapunyal.
Seemed every man and his mongrel
watched cadets stumble
on the long march to the Viet jungle.
"Oh Christ," I mumbled as I drew that card
and my mates came to slap me on the back with due regard.
We were the sixth battalion and the next to tour.
We did Canungra and Shoalwater before we left, rest assured.

Seemed half of Townsville turned out to see us leave,
and they lined the footpaths as we marched to the quay,
And the papers wrote it up like you wouldn't believe
but we were looking to the future for a fast reprieve.
And there's all of us looking young,
strong and clean rockin' slouch hats,
slung SLRs and greens.

God help me, I was only nineteen.

From Vung Tau the black helicopters,
the chinhook pilots seemed relieved at Nui Dat when they dropped us.
Seems like months running on and off landing pads,
letters to Dad,
'cause it's like, man, he's sad.
But he can't see the tents that we call home,
cans of VB, pin-ups on the lockers of chicks off TV,
The noise, the mosquitoes and the heat suprising
like the first time you see an agent orange horizon.

So please can you tell me doctor why I still can't get to sleep?
The scar's left in me,
Night time's just a jungle,
dark and a barking M16 that keeps saying
"rest in peace".
And what's this rash that comes and goes,
I don't suppose you can tell me what that means?

God help me, I was only nineteen.

Sent off on a four-week long operation
where every single step could be your last one.
My two legs were sorta living hell
falling with the shells, war within yourself.
But you couldn't let your mates down
'til they had you dusted off,

so you closed your eyes and thought of something else.

Then someone yelled "contact!"
another bloke swore.
We hooked in there for hours then a god almighty roar,
Then Frankie kicked a mine
the day that mankind kicked the moon.

God help him, he was going home in June.

And I can still see Frank with a can in his hand,
thirty-six hour leave in the bar at the Grand.
I can still hear Frank
a screaming mess
of bleeding flesh,
couldn't retrieve his legs.

You see the ANZAC legend,
neglected to mention
the mud,
the fear,
the blood,
the tears,
the tension,
Dad's recollection
beyond comprehension.
Didn't seem quite real until we were sent in.
The chaos and confusion,
the fire and steel,
hot shrapnel in my back:
I didn't even feel it.

God help me, I was only nineteen.

Mum and Dad and Denny saw the passing out parade at Puckapunyal,
It was a long march from Cadets.
The sixth battalion was the next to tour,
It was me who drew the card.
we did Canungra and Shoalwater before we left.

So please can you tell me doctor,
why I can't get to sleep?
I can't hardly eat.
And the sound of the Channel Seven chopper still chills me to my feet,
still fuels my grief.
And what's this rash that comes and goes like the dreams,
can you tell me what that means?

God help me, I was only nineteen.

A Change is Gonna Come

Original Sam Cooke Version

I was born by the river in a little tent,
And just like that river I've been running ever since.
It's been a long time coming
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.

It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die,
Cos I don't know what's out there beyond the sky.
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.

And then I go to see my brother,
And I ask him to help me please,
And he just winds up knockin' me
Back down on my knees.

There were times when I thought I couldn't last for long,
But now I think I'm able to carry on.
It's been a long, been a long time coming
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.

Revised Version by The Herd

[Verse 1: Nookie]

I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh, and just like a river I've been running ever since.
It's been a long, long time coming,
But I know a change is gonna come.

[Verse 2: Ozi Batla]

I was born by the river in a small coastal town
Where the smell of the strange fruit still floats around.
I was shown that tree where the fruits used to swing
That were strung up in stringed slicks, swaying in the wind,
With blood on the wattle, trees whipped by the slicks;
I turned away when they cringe,
Mum said listen to them sing,
And then I heard the breeze bring the most terrible thing...
All that's changed now is that ropes and tyres swing.

Change, well it won't happen in a day,
They said "eventually".
How many weeks, decades or centuries?
Mistakes made, they can't be washed away so simply
And symbolism's weak medicine for grievous injury.
False smiles frontin' false idols, hiding discrimination,
A feel-good slogan, some self-congratulation,
Empty statements, while the hangman's ghost is still waiting

In the lockup, the paddy wagon, 12 shells on the pavement.

[Verse 3: Sky High]

It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die,
'Cos I don't know what's up there beyond the sky.
It's been a long, long time coming,
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.

It's all about history but that's his story,
And I'm trynna to tell ya bout mine
Still coppin' chases from the bacon
My brother taken by swine.
If the biggest gang in my country are the ones that pack Glock 9,
Then them guns be with the gunjies
Who say they're here to stop crime.
Now that ain't that ironic, no Alanis,
But you oughta know the truth:
The queen was boss when they stole us,
Now the King's Cross they shoot.
Surrounded by the abuse
Lemme tell what I'mma do,
I'm a rep for all my youth,
With a big F.U. to the boys in blue!
They picked the wrong time.

[Verse 4: Nookie]

I go to the movies, and I go down town.
Somebody can tell me where to go hang around.
It's been a long, long time coming,
But I know a change is gonna come.

We though the war was over
But now we have to fight.
We got the right to vote, but I don't see no one to vote for.
Devoted to the cause, I live for everything I'd die for.
Yeah, and my shoes take a walk, try to understand my life and my dreaming.
The government is scheming, oops, I mean they're "intervening!"
Mine the land, why are we leaving?
But we ain't leaving!
These words are my last damn!
The prize can't be changed but the future can.

Should I not go to my brother, not say, "brother, help me please?"
But he winds up knocking me back down to on my knees!

[Verse 5: Sky High]

First up, I'm gonna change the flag,
Southern Cross, leave that,
Exchange the Union Jack for that red yellow and black!
Sick 'n tired of waiting for change
So I'm making a change today!

And I beg that my people out beggin' be given a new begginin', okay!
Long time,
Too long if you asked me,
Said a change gonna come,
Long gone,
Has been,
Only way to move on is to get along
You'd better not get it wrong!
'Cos after it all, aren't we all one under the sun?
I'm done!

Well there's been times when I thought it would last for long
And I think I'm unable to carry on.
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know that change is gonna come.
Oh, yes it will.

TUG DUMBLY

“Tug Dumbly is a phenomenon. He is a masterful performer and an excellent communicator with a vigour for spoken word that electrifies the room” – The Scotsman (Edinburgh Fringe Festival).

Tug Dumbly is the pseudonym of Australian performance poet and musician Geoff Forrester. He has released two albums, namely "Junk Culture Lullabies" (2001) and Idiom Savant (2003).

Tug is best known for his work on ABC radio. He started by spraying poems and rants on Triple J's Brekky Show, and can currently be heard delivering his weekly take on news and current affairs in The Tug Report, on the ABC's Local Radio Network. Tug is perhaps Australia's most highly broadcast and recognized performance poet (admittedly not a difficult feat) and has gained a committed following of dozens through performing his satirical poems, songs and comic monologues at lots of venues and festivals, both nationally and abroad, including New York, Montreal, London, Edinburgh and Glebe. He has released two mildly acclaimed spoken-word CDs through the ABC - Junk Culture Lullabies and Idiom Savant - and twice won the Banjo Paterson Prize for comic verse, once for his 8000 word epic ode to meat Barbeque Bill and the Roadkill Café.

Ordinary Australians

Pollies keep waffling on about what ordinary Australians think,
what they do, what they feel, what they like to drink.
And yet I've never seen one with my own eyes,
an ordinary Australian, alive in the wild.
Maybe they've been wiped out, like the Tassie Tiger,
hunted to extinction, without a sole survivor.
Maybe they're a myth like the Yowie and the Sasquatch,
the Yeti, the Dropbear or a pretty parking cop.
But eyewitnesses swear the creature's mammalian,
with both female and male genitalia.
A hairy-chested mongrel with a pair of breasts,
one old and sagging, the other quite erect.
kind of a Chameleon, hard to define,
of variable colour, creed, shape and size -
half blonde, half bald with the wrinkled face
of a crusty cane cutter, of no fixed race.
The nose is kinda Roman, the cheekbones Germanic
the brow Aboriginal, the eyes Asiatic.
It has a painter's hands, with a shearer's back,
the legs of a dancer and great dividin' crack.
It drives a beat-up kombi which converts to a SAAB,
belongs to the RSL but hangs in leather bars.
It's handy with a chainsaw but loves saving whales
as a Harley Riding member of the CWA.
It begs like a bum, flaunts like a Packer
is cunning as a Skase, vacant as a Slacker,
It wears Armani, cries like a snag,
works in an abattoir done up in drag.
It plays Lawn Bowls and worships Menzies
along with the Devil in orgiastic frenzies.
It fought at Gallipoli - on both sides,
protested 'Nam and likes to ride
skateboards, wheelchairs, prams and scooters,
it sings like Nellie Melba and swears like a trooper.
It lives in a humpy at the back of Broken Hill,
leaves Pumpkin Scones cooling on the window sill.
It goes to church Sunday, raves on Saturday night,
protests for peace, but loves a bar room fight.
It's strictly vegetarian, except for when it slips
into a country pub for bistro steak and chips.
It's a saint like Mary MacKillop, crook as Neddy Smith
bold as Bob Ellis and loves to take the piss.
It goes to the opera and digs Figaro,
but gets more cultural kicks from the Footy Show.
It's a Muslim, it's a Buddhist, it's a Christian, it's a Jew,
it's a member of a Bankstown Hip-Hop crew.
It's centrefold sexy, rough as Bruce Ruxton,

doesn't follow fashion or care what it chucks on.
It's a poofter, it's a lezzo, it's a bloody man's man,
it's a ballet dancing truckie rolling rigs across the land.
It's a junkie, a gym-head, a fully-fledged freak,
it's a gun-toting redneck racist cyber geek.
It's a boffin, a meathead, a petrol-headed prude,
it's a musty academic that says hey dude,
It gets off on Coltrane, Mahler and Bach,
likes Death Metal and digs South Park.
It's a wanker, it's a winner, it's a yobbo, it's a snob,
it's a microcosmic member of a multi-culti mob.
There's a rumour goin' 'round it was bred by aliens ...
but you and I know different - it's an ordinary Australian.

Sin City

After being voted the city with the World's best
Restaurants, location and lifestyle
Sydney had a quiet drink and
gave itself a modest pat on the back.

Then after a few more beers
Sydney loosened up and made a
rude little joke about Brisbane.
Adelaide and Perth smiled nervously
while Canberra said it was tired and going home.

But Sydney kicked on with some Martinis and Margaritas,
before heading off to snort coke in the dunny.
Sydney swaggered out and started doing tequila shots
and wolf-whistling at waitresses.

Then Sydney saw Melbourne quietly reading in a corner
And yelled across the bar:
hey Mel, ya big poof, ya readin' 'bout
how to pick up a root, or what?
Melbourne just gave a disdainful look
and went back to its book.

But Sydney continued: *Hey Mel,*
did you know the sun shines out my harbour?
Here, cop a look at Godzone!
At which Sydney leapt on a table
dropped its daks and flashed Melbourne a
blazing bright yellow eye.
Then Sydney started dancing on the table,
lewdly gyrating with its pants around its ankles
taunting Melbourne, saying
na na na na na! Sucked in Melbourne
you old drizzle-bound Goth
you Camus-cuddling wanker
you fossilised pile of snob dung.
You're just jealous of my beautiful sun
and my beautiful harbour
and my beautiful bridge
and my big silicon hills
and botoxed beaches
and pectoral-pumped horizons
and the Sydney Swans beating you at your own stupid game ...

All you got's your poxy trams and flat-chested streets
and pigeon-shitty monuments to crumbling colonial boredom ...
What's that? Oh!, You had the Commonwealth Games?

*Oooh, how Maaarvellous, darling!! ...
Yeah, good on ya,
must have been fun watching that piss-poor flea-circus
huddled in your anorak-clad igloo
trying to warm yourself with your own pathetic
mousaka flavoured farts ...
Oh, by the way, did you know that I, Sydney,
had the OLYMPIC GAMES –
GREATEST GAMES EVER! OI! OI! OI!...*

Well, Melbourne just shook its head
finished its macchiato
and quietly got up and left.
And by now all the other towns had gone home as well,
even hardcore party towns like San Fransisco and Acapulco.
So the manager came over
and politely asked Sydney to please leave.
But Sydney just snarled *ah, get fucked!*
and had the manager re-developed.

Sydney used the manager's blood to paint itself red -
drank more, smoked more, snorted more
dropped more pills
Went clubbing till six
then had an orgy with itself
before crashing round ten.
Sydney woke up pregnant
reproduced and became the World's first
truly hermaphroditic city.
But then Sydney got too big and old and tired and fat
with constipation, bad circulation and blocked arteries.
Sydney de-hydrated, got asthmatic, obese
and finally collapsed in a blubbering, wheezing heap.

Sydney got carted off to re-hab
where they said: *what seems to be the problem sir?*
And Sydney screamed:
look, stop personifying me!
I'm not a person, okay!
I'm just a city with faults like anyone, okay!
So stop stretching this stupid bloody metaphor anymore, okay!
... but there is one little favour ya could do for me ...
reckon ya could hire Melbourne to do a hit on Keneally and O'Farrell
and feed their guts to the Greens?

ILLY

b. 1986

A young Melbourne MC by the name of Ill Al (aka Illy The Kid), who runs with the Crooked Eye fam (featuring Phrase, Daniel Merriweather, J-Skub and DJ Flagrant) is making his way up on the Australian Hip Hop scene.

Illy (born 1986) is an emcee from Melbourne, Victoria. With his solo repertoire forged in his two-volume mixtape (released in 2007 and 2008 respectively), illy marches forward as the new voice in Generation Now hip hop. A writer, a lyrical activist, an observer, and a poet, he treks through the global jigsaw with firm optimism and understanding of its rollercoaster nature. Influenced by a kaleidoscope of artists from Nas to Bob Marley, Biggie to Bob Dylan, the 23-year-old MC boasts a spitfire flow, both youthful and intelligent but ripe with attitude; complimenting his world-traversing musical vision. A vision he calls a privilege, the act of creating art meaningful to complete strangers. Having shared the rush of performing live with Bliss N Eso, Phrase, Spit Syndicate, and Dialectrix to name some, his aural journey takes the next step with the debut of his full length album, *Long Story Short*. Tales, tribulations and tributes to the nature of his youth, his culture, and the inevitable questions faced. He is the heart and soul of the underdog, the future flag-bearer of a much maligned generation.

It Can Wait

It's like that money in my palm, soon as I spend it, want it,
Soon as it's on I'm off it, soon as I get it, lost it.
It's like the moment compared to staring at pictures of it.
It pick you up then drop you down, you blink you missed it, wish you watched
it.

So amazing when it's there, when it ain't it's so unfair.
Go from square one to atmosphere, then back to here, and
I thought I had it on lock, turns out you can't restrict it,
Can't rush it can't predict it, that's part and parcel with
Happiness, happiness is fine but it's momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my
Happiness, happiness is fine but it's momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my happiness.

We take that weekend by storm, tick tour dates off tour posters,
Start that long sleep to sober, then just like that it's over.
We party like rock stars, looking down on how kings would live and
Wake up to setting suns, smoke stains on our fingertips, but
It's perfect in that moment, we own it, it's ours,
No happy ever afters, just happy for right nows,
So fleeting so profound, thoughts full in my head,
It's nights I won't remember, with mates I'll never forget, that's my
Happiness, happiness is fine but it's momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my
Happiness, happiness is fine but it's momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my happiness.

Full tilt, we hit them highs, man they come and go like seasons.
I know when it's arrived, hardly catch it till its leaving.
Hold tight, for them up and downs.
Hold tight, hold on, and don't slow down.
That's my up and downs.

Yea, ain't no amount of words, close to define that feeling,
Reality and dreaming, tow that fine line between 'em.
Soon as it got here, it's leaving, dunno when its going round again, but
Move forward, push towards it, means justify the end, so
We're scouring far and wide, through love and fear and hurting,
But after all that searching, goddamn it it's worth it,

Bang the head of the nail, we don't dream to scale.
Long as there's wind in my sails, I'm-a staying hot on the trail, my
Happiness, happiness is fine but it's momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my
Happiness, happiness is fine but its momentary,
A momentary lapse of reality,
Reality is fine, but for the moment it can wait,
I'm addicted to the chase of my happiness.

On and On

Yeah, life's a song that plays once through, true,
So I keep my best days in my front view,
'Cause sure thing, one day I'll be gone,
But I don't want forever, nah, I don't need that long.
Look, I just need, like, 15 minutes and a chance
'Cause I don't wanna think man, I just wanna dance
With my friends, with my love with a drink in my hand
With a full house rocking out, singing our jams while the beat goes...

On and on
And it plays and it plays and it's gone
And it goes around, comes back around
And it's been around but it goes
On and on.
So it plays and it plays and it's gone
And it's all good but 'till that comes
The beat goes on and on.

Yeah, life's a song so I write mine with love,
And I write mine with truth to you.
How they say "Youth's wasted on the young,"
When our mind's like bullets rounds rolling off the tongue.
Hearts beating like this
You'd think it was drums.
So full of sweet melodies, we'll sleep when we're done,
Take in each ray of sunshine, save it for when rainy days come
'Cause them rainy days will come for each one the beat goes...
On and on...

Yeah, life's a song it ain't one run forever,
And the best parts in are the ones sung together.
So, look, I don't wanna be alone,
So play it through the speakers, you can keep the headphones.
Shit, I just wanna go but you can come too,
You could share my view, we can sing the same tune.
All roads lead to somewhere, life's like music.
For each new direction you move in, never lose your roots
'Cause it's not what's now it's what lasts.
It's less about the outcome, more about the path,
Cause life passes, blink hard you miss parts.
So, look 'em in the eye and you speak from the heart.
You're never what you aren't.
No point trying to swap your voice for another's.
Laugh loud, love lots and dance like nobody's there to watch
'Cause one day the song will stop like...
But 'till then the beat goes
On and on.

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